





RHODANTHE
OR
THE ROSE IN THE GARDEN OF THE
SOUL'S DELIGHT

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SOUL'S DELIGHT

A POETIC FANTASY

BY

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TO
C. C.

RHODANTHE
OR
THE ROSE IN THE GARDEN OF THE
SOUL'S DELIGHT

Est rosa flos Veneris.
Old Latin Ode.

BOOK I

SPRING, in her flowered amice, and her wreath
Of Mary-buds had come to town! Beneath
The rosy palms of her white feet, Love strewed
Aurora's tears shed for her son; and wooed
Was she by sweet sequestered quires of birds:
For she had lingered long away, and words
Heavened in music, from glad planes and pines,
Hailed her from Hiems crowned in the Apennines!
The morning-stars had sung her, as of yore
At her nativity, and Sol his floor
Celestial paven had with brilliancies
Unparagoned, to show his ecstasies
At her enthronement. 'Twas a day earth smiled,

At last, as one will after months beguiled
By weary winter's rueful frowns.—And now
The holiday was over, and from her brow
Engarlanded the buds are soon untressed;
And lullabied with carollings, at rest
She lies in Nature's loving arms,—to sleep
The night,—and wistful flowers 'gin to weep.

O Night—with what dark magic dost thou thrill
The universal heart! How all is still!
Day's motley train hath fled the cypress-gloom,
And guardian-silence of thy ghostly tomb;
Softly old Arno toward his sea-home creeps;
Softly the moonbeam o'er his bosom leaps;
Fair 'mid her Tuscan hill-crowns Florence sleeps.
All, all is hushed, and fairies in their rings,
Give way to sorceries and weird ministerings;
Poets, and Singers, Sages mock pale Death,—
And even as if their souls stalked forth in stealth
To wander free, the air surchargèd, teems
With inspiration. So, at least, it seems
To me, as woe-distraught, I walk alone,
My shadow and myself attuned as one,
Along Lung' Arno.

Many a time and oft,
Wooing Urania, in the heavenly loft
Pavilioned, I, in contemplation rapt,
Had roamed the storied streets of Florence, lapped
In flowers,—“The Beautiful;”—to wend my way
To Rosamund’s garden-close, which ’long the kay
Of Arno trailed its glories, wreathed in bays.
To Rosamund I would fly, as elfish rays
Back to their sun return; and all the world
Echoed with song! But now, alas, impearled
In tears, the song is voiceless; and for weeks
The flowers hide their dew-bedabbled cheeks,
When I among them walk,—for my dear love
Is dead. Ah! now no more the sheen of dove
Is on the dawn; no more her sister-flowers
Wondrously watch her, as in beauty she towers
Among them: none shall succor them; instead,
They, too, alas, must die. Thy purple head,
Poor foolish Columbine, shall droop and pine;
Ye Gales, fond Gilliflowers, Sops-in-Wine,
That in my Shepherd’s Calendar did mark
Love’s seasons,—now your days shall all be dark;
For your fair mistress is forever gone!
To water you to life my tears alone

Shall flow! Ah, empty, dull to me life's shore!
The woman that I love lights now no more
With her effulgent radiance the earth!
We could not hold her spirit of heavenly birth;
So pink and white—so like a flower grown,
She faded ere the summer buds had blown:
And all the nightingales sat hushed and lone.

Blue as the gentians fringed were her bright eyes,
Mocking the azure smiles of April's skies;
Her lips, curled rose-buds, kissed by Summer's rain,
Parting, exhaled a breath of sweets Hyblæan;
Her tresses glowed like hearts of marigold,
Full-bared to heaven, Apollo to enfold;
Her lily-hand—how cold in mine it stole!
How veinèd blue the lids!—where once her soul
Enskied, shone with its pure and earthless love:—
They bore her beauteous body to the grove
Of weeping yews, and 'fore a graven pile
They left me mourning o'er her vanished smile;
To envy those on whom the crystal wells
Of her celestial love, where now she dwells.

Into the garden-close I wander, dreary—
O, ne'er had I so felt the spell of mystery

O'erhanging its deserted ruins!—tree
And flower trembled paly,—suddenly,
My heart benumbed is seized with fearful awe
Of ominous expectation, doubt: I saw
The earth grow dark; the moon o'ercast; the dirge
I heard of dying winds; and, then, the surge
Of air that breathed of Afric's sands, so arid,
I stifle,—stumble—helpless to have parried
My fall: but, haply, on a carvèd seat,
Which once in Cyprus had adorned the sweet,
Recessèd temple of the flower-faced queen
Of love and beauty,—sconced now in a screen
Of her soft myrtles,—measure I my length;
My heart surceased in dreamful swoon of strength
To flutter—and I knew no more.—

How long

Thus prone I lay, bound in the ebon thong
Unconsciousness, I wot not,—ere I seemed
To hear the Duomo toll—perhaps I dreamed—
Slowly the midnight hour, the trysting-time
Of fairy folk;—and, then, the distant chime
Of an unearthly music lulled my being
To rhapsody, with mystic urge of seeing
Beyond the veil,—as though life's golden motes

Dissolved in crystal suns,—as though those notes
Of distilled sweetness, new to my poor ears,
Soothed all my senses with delicious fears,
Disquieting, yet desired. Now, by minions
Viewless, I 'm lifted, as on airy pinions,
Athwart the soft ambrosial air; then pales
My glooming world, as if night's starless scales
Had fallen from my lidded eyes; and lo!
In tranced amazement breathlessly I glow,
Before the dazzling scene unfolded: I hood
Mine eyes so startling is the sight!

I stood

Within a portico of porphyry
And gold, bewildering as the vistaed sky;
With myriad aisles of Doric colonnades,
And wondrous flights of stairs with balustrades
Of carved Pentelic,—at the river's edge
Ending, amid pale lily-pads and sedge.
Paven it was with jades, and marbles white
As Pindus, and in oceans bathed of light
Celestial; scarves and delicatest screens
Of Tyrian silks in melting hues, warm greens,
Cerulean, rose,—across the columns pendant,—
Seek the amorous smiles to veil of the ascendant,

And golden-thronèd Phoebus, from beviae fair
Of lovely nymphs, and Dryads, dazzling, rare,
Of archful grace, that 'round me rhythmic dance;
Strewing crushed petals at my feet, with glance
Deep-reverent; while their sylph-like bodies sway
To music of Arcadian Pan, who, gay
Enwreathed his hornèd poll, I, now, behold
With 's merry crew, 'mid emblems of the wold,
A-piping on his reeds, as 't were a dream
Of sighing for poor Syrinx in the stream.
Where'er I look rise temple-crownèd mountains;
While airy sunlight plays on crystal fountains
Of sweet Castalian springs; in peaceful hopes
The nestling villas gleam 'mid vine-clad slopes,
And hanging-gardens like the Hesperides;
And nymphs disporting in the groves one sees,
Amid the checkered shade, as if an age
Of old had strayed out of its Sapphic page;
Whilst like the lutings of a mourning-dove,—
As though its nature is to vainly love,—
A gentle river murmuringly laves
The cold white marbles of the wharf; its waves,
Its bosom, heaving for the blue Aegean,
Haply,—but still it faithful stays to preen,

And shimmeringly mirror in its breast,
The skies, the fields—each villa's verdant nest.

And whilst I drink in wonder-draughts the scene,
A comely youth, his soft sweet airs I ween
Patrician-born, and 'tired for some feast
Lucullian, bows me low, as would the least
Plebeian,—Roman, Greek, I wot not which;
Then links mine arm, and saith, in accents rich
With human melody, more Lesbian
Than Latian: "All hail, good friend! upon
The hour thou 'rt here betimes; I pray thee, pardon
Our tryst belated; those that honor thee,
The blessings of the foam-born Deity
Of Gardens and of Flowers waited. Lo!
They come, to wish auspicious winds will blow
For thee, Zephyrus, to his Flora dear."
In sooth, even as he spoke, from far and near,
Troops in a pageant, brave and beautiful:
Cherub-faced children, tender, fanciful
As Cupid looked at seven; damsels fresh
For merry-making, in whose smilets' mesh
Shy swains had fallen, but that matrons, staid
As Vesta, shadow them, and thus dissuade

The amorous sport; youths, fair of hair and lithe,
With sheaves of golden corn; and maidens blithe,
Loaden with osiers piled with mellowest fruits,
With nard and incense and sweet-smelling roots;
Some with the Naiad's trophy, Plenty's horn;
Shepherds with crooks, and Shepherdesses born
To featly dight a meadow's daisied lawn;
Ceres herself, in cloud-wrapt chariot drawn,
Her raven tresses pranked with scarlet poppies;
Vertumnus, god of orchards, too, his eyes
Ogling askance the luscious grapes his wife
Pomona 'fore him dangles for his strife.
But midst the crowd, of all the cynosure,
Are dainty maidens, rosy, lily-pure—
Belike a dozen—who seem from the skies
To have dropped,—else hath some god bewitched mine eyes!
Truly they sway about like lovely flowers;
Their dewy kirtles fresh from April showers;
With smiles and tears bright on their cheeks, all dimpled
Fair divine; in gold and crimson whimpled,
With azure eyes—. But flower-beings to walk,
To nod, to bow, and chirrup on their stalk,
Like magpies!—'t is, indeed, incredulous!
And I do pinch myself half-querulous

With pain—and still in wonder take the truth:
Content to think, here's "Dian's Bud," forsooth;
"Love-in-the-Mist," and "Love-in-Idleness,"
Pale Primrose, and eke "Eyebright"—in their dress
Of cerule radiance,—rose, and pink, and lily—
Flower-beings, truly, willy-nilly!
So let my seeing and belief concur.

"Is 't holiday in high Olympus, sir?"
I ask my Ganymede. With gentle purr,
He smiles, "Be patient"—so my qualms I smother.
The throngers greet me as they would a brother;
Their voices' soft susurrus lulls the breeze,
Like buzzing exodus of honey bees.
Warmly I am "All hailed!" as Caesar might be;
As one beloved and by the Thunderer rightly
High-favored;—but not knowing why or how,
I stammer words I scarce remember now.
Around me all the multitude foregathers;
Modelled to sons by patriarchal fathers,—
To mothers loom I as a future son.
The music waxes to its diapason;
Whilst in a weirder, wilder beauty has burst
The Corybantic dance. Now, whereas erst

No cloud appeared to mirth, a parting note
Of poignant sadness I divine afloat
Upon the air; though laugh the ruddy lips,
The eyes in tears, the heart in sorrow grips,
Whispering "*Addio*": as though this heavenly expanse
Of scene the crowd is loth to leave—perchance,
Fore'er,—this spot of earth supremely lovely.

Its reason I inquire,—but, hurriedly,
My Sphinx-like friend has gained the river-side;
I dog his deer-swift steps, all Argus-eyed,—
When, curiously, the air with pungent sweetness
O'erpowers me; and, with a lightning fleetness,
My senses whirl from Lethe-draughts drunk deep:—
And as in Lotus-dreams of rose-stoled sleep,
Visions of airy splendors rise, I see,
As in a magic mirror of ancientsry,
In diamond mist of sunlight all a-quiver,
Loom up upon the bosom of the river,
An iris-lovely, fairy-vessel! lit
With rippling smiles the waters herald it;
It glides along like Leda with a grace
Ineffable; ay, fancy seems apace
To riot, for 't now appears a Flower-ship,

Or some aërial garden in the slip
Of river floating, as if through some rift,
An isle of Paradise had run adrift.

Engarlanded are mast and poop and prow,
With blooms that had made Tempe blush and bow,
Her shows out-miracled,—and mine eyes confuse,
With tints the rainbow's iridescent hues
Had mocked in vain,—from vermeil dew-lipped rose,
To sweetest woodland violet that grows;
To tender, twining, scented eglantine;
To all earth's myriad buds, bright, hyaline,—
Jewels, like stars, that deck her day and night,
Making a heaven for man's dear delight!
All these blaze forth enpanoplied in glory,
Beyond the wildest dreams of rhyme or story:
The flaming creepers trellis o'er the shrouds;
Pale clematis, in soft purpureal clouds,
O'ercanopies the decks in sombre moods;
The benches twined with love-knots of the woods;
And all the dripping oars, with rare peach-blossom
Enwreathèd, from the riches, which embosom
The river, filch pure gems of orient pearls
And opalescent drops,—the flower-whorls

Bedighting with a sweet reflected beauty.—
The dream-boat's steered by hands invisibly;
It stops,—and, to my awful wonderment,
As if by Hermes' magic disenthralment,
The vessel with enchanted life doth seem
In multi-colored loveliness to teem:
She docks; lo, cables long of pied and streaked
Convolvulus are cast ashore, and eked
Full taut to bind her fast; the spiced air
Lulls me to poppy-slumber; dimly I hear
Faint tristful "Fare-thee-wells," and blushing kisses
Swift stolen, as, alas, all earthly blisses!
My Mentor claps my shoulder, and, ere I
Can find my wildered tongue, or even sigh
Amazement free—I'm on the bark; then, Pan
And 's crew, still piping, follow to a man;
Then all the nymphs, and dancing Dryads too,
Sweet lads and lassies, and the entire crew.

They jostle, jest; they laugh, they sing together;
Now they are off, tears stanchèd—they're in fine feather!
So on our earth had ordinary mortals done,—
These, rarer spirits of a sphere Elysian,
Ethereal! But, where'er emotion springs,

The notes of heaven or earth sweep o'er Life's strings,
With music of the self-same sweet alluring!—
A joyous shout! The vessel slips her mooring,
And as a star had fled 'fore Phaeton's fire,
It swiftly steals away. I scarce suspire,
From whelming sense of mystery and awe,
At every Nature's nice inexorable law
Ruthless subversed: yet is there no ado
Or dissonance; the noiseless, unseen crew,
Clamber the shrouds, I trow, for sails upsoar;
With rhythmic cadence swings the impatient oar;
And languorously o'er the water's blue we ride,
The while the living Flowers strangely glide,
Like fairies through a garden fair. Commands
From wreathèd conch-shells sound, and all the hands
Speed on its way the bark with soft acclaims
Of joy. Now on the air there fall sweet names,
Of Basil, Amaryllis, Asphodel,—
As though they meet and kiss 'neath love's old spell,—
Of Lotis, Rosemary and Daffodil,
Mingled with honeyed sighs that haunt me still.
“Who are these blessèd beings?” from my guide
Enlightenment I seek,—“and whither ride
We now away?” Proudly the youth towers:

“Our craft is making for the Isle of Flowers,
Where Flora dwells, fair Goddess Crystalline;
And these are subjects of her realm benign,”
He saith, “all happily homeward bound, you see;
They ’re from a pilgrimage in Araby,
Their perfume-bearing school,—to breathe full-blown
The incense of their souls before the throne
Of Flora, in her servitude and love;
Some from the Isle to greet them hither rove:
Thou saw’st, too, gods and genii of the grove,
Of fields and gardens and the sacred fount;
Ay, deities of the high Thessalian Mount,
Come bid them long farewell upon the ways;
From Ceres to the simplest of the fays;
The dew of tears did mutely witness there,
That parting home was easier to bear,
Than longings nourished for the Flowery Isle.—”
With this, across the empurpled deep somehow
He pointed,—for we now, unconsciously,
Had entered Neptune’s wider realm the sea:
“Behold yon golden parapets, where gleam
The farewell kisses, Phoebus, in his dream
Of dying, lingeringly lavishes
Upon the closing day, and ravishes

The eye with beauty,—there doth lie the Land
Of Flowers, and there, the Goddess Flora's wand
Enchanting, Nature charms with loving yoke:
And when the sable Leto's star-woven cloak
Enfolds the world, and tired mortals sleep,
Her Flower-Pixies zone the earth, and sweep,
And gardens dight from Indus to the poles;
And fright away the cankers, slugs, and moles;
While Flower-Elves brush hoar-rime from each rose,
And 'gainst the frost the rash corollas close;
And when the blue-bells swing full airily,—
Though thou couldst not detect their harmony
Exquisite, when they tell the midnight hour,—
The spirits troop from every lovely Flower
Being asleep, and wander hill and dell
Delectable of earth, to briefly dwell
With their terrestrial brethren; and then,
In Flora's kingdom death seems in the ken
Of all; the soul-less Flowers droop their heads;
The blenchèd hue of dissolution spreads
Over their rosy petals; and their perfume
Wanes on the air, until, with faint illume,
Aurora, blushing paly as she rises
From false amours of Cephalus, surprises

The slumbering world: then, all the shadowy throng
To their coronas hie themselves headlong,
Ere day's proclaimed.

“And for that thou hast lost

Thy lady fair,—who dear the starry host
Of earth cherished, so that they thrilled in bloom
Unparagoned, and from her teeming womb
Burst forth in wingèd splendor unsurpassed,—
As guerdon of her true-love tears, thou wast
Vouchsafed by Flora, Goddess Argentine.
The keys unto her City Palatine,—
A gift to mortals never yet accorded:
There shalt thou find in foison thee afforded,
Surcease of every sorrow and despite;
And sipping Hybla's honey of delight,
Live, learn and love anew.” Thus spake the youth;
And as I gazed, the silvery veil, insooth,
Of spangly moonbeams, which bright Cynthia trails
Over the rippling waters, swathes our sails;
And one by one the lamps of heaven are trimmed,
That carols by the seraphs may be hymned
To daisied Night in adoration:—
And as we near our destination,
Nereïds from out the pearly waters rise,

Languidly swaying in liquid lullabies
Upon the listless undulating sea;
Haply, they come to greet us, for I see
Some bearing odorous garlands, others ropes
Of blossoms, corals, magic heliotropes,
By the Hours weaved; these to our vessel's side
They gaily fasten; faster on we glide,
Midst merry laughing songs of such as roam
No more afar—soon warmly welcomed home.
Now in the phosphor-gleaming waves disport
The playful dolphins; and all Neptune's court
In amorous retinue charms us in to port;
Cygnet and snow-white swans, belovèd by
The Paphian goddess-queen, glide gracefully
Along the sacred shore, as we draw nigh;
Whilst Triton's winding horn with melody
Floodeth the night. And now, at last, we plough
Our latest furrow, and on our curvèd prow
Light Cupid's doves, by his fond mother sent,
To augur our safe harborage and advent.

Now on the bark the wild'st confusion reigns,
As there loom up before our eyes, the fanes
Enchanting, towers of gracefulness supreme,

And golden gates, of what to me doth seem,
Some fabled Island of Atlantis blest;
Or an Elysium by Pindar tressed
In tender lays of lyric tunefulness,—
So ravishing its faery loveliness!
Its multitudinous temples, mosques; its domes,
Pale rose and hyacinthine glowing, poems
In Parian marbles,—which in sacred fire
Apollo might have conjured up with 's lyre,
As he did Troy,—are maze-like even to tire
Imagination, and had fancy wronged.
Its quays, paved with Carrara's snows, are thronged;
To the water's edge the populace hath strayed,
In all its silks and damasks fine arrayed;
While dancing nymphs, and maids, and Coryphées,
With dulcet voices sing melodious lays,
To dreamy music of the lulling lute-string,
And sway my soul to ecstasy! They ring
Sweet silver bells, and with resounding cheers,
Regreet us newly, till my wildered ears,
Wondrously thrilled with sounds of kissing cymbals,
With beating of the throbbing drums and timbrels—
Make me to close mine eyes in dreamful flight
Of dying midst such languorous delight!

Whilst my rapt soul in heaven seems to wake,
To me the Hermes of my voyage spake:
“Thou ’rt tenfold honored, mortal, for, behold,
Without the city gates of beaten gold,
Flora, the Goddess Opaline, appears
In stately palanquin enthroned; and peers,
Princesses, nobles, all her august court
Contains of beauty, wealth, as her escort,
To meet thee by the water-side. Her lord,
The gentle Zephyr, by whom the queen ’s adored,—
Though now abroad he haply seeks to assuage
The boisterous Aeolus’s spluttering rage,—
Yet wafted was our vessel to Flora’s feet,
By ’s plaintive sighing for his mistress sweet.”
And, verily, the scene with splendor shone!
Too swift the dizzy flight to Helicon
For my poor muse’s moth-like wings! Too well,
This pomp and pageantry processional,
Which pours upon the ways and lines the strand,
For glittering miles it seems where I must land,
I fear may prove some bright mirage, some vision,
Inveigling my wild fancy past volition!
Not in dream-fabrics, fairy-born, or gnome;
Not in the golden days of Greece or Rome,

Was half this glory seen—ay, ne'er before!
I trembling gaze upon that heavenly shore,
While mists of happy tears, bright from the fount
Pierian of pure joy, do silverly mount,
Suffusing all mine eyes; and cheeks bepaint
With briny runlets. With emotions faint,
Succumbs my spirit in its ardent flame:
I hear the wondrous multitude acclaim
Their queen, and marvel at the royal visit
I am vouchsafed.

With snugness exquisite,
Our flower-bark within her island berth
Lays up her fragrant beauty; and, to earth
Safely consigned, we leave her friendly deck.
I'm led away, with steps that scarcely reckon
Their path, by Flora's proud ambassadors,
Appointed to my care: each one adores
Some Lady-Flower fair, and slyly mourned
Attendance on her; each one is adorned
In glittering livery of his Queen,—unstinted
Their poppy-scarlet, thymy-purple, tinted
Pansy-hues, and warmest sylvan greens;
Accompanying them in cowslip-yellow sheens,

With rubies flecked, are tiny elves. We pass
O'er three-piled blossoms and sweet smelling grass,
Softer than rugs of Persian looms; apace
With us, fair virgins clothed in Hebe's grace,
Lute-voiced, strew rosy chaplets in our way.
Forthwith to Flora I my homage pay:
Four giant Nubians—ebon columns—stay
Her litter downy-light, which, at a sign
Of her fair lily-hand, they slow recline
Upon the enrichèd earth. The Goddess lifts
The jealous veil her beauty hides, as rifts
Disparting in the clouds disclose fair heaven:
O Deity divine! O bliss! and leaven
Ambrosial of life's melancholiness!
High majesty! Empyrean loveliness!
And yet, withal, what woman's tenderness
Exhaleth from those eyes of starry shine!
Half-blinded, kneel I down as 'fore a shrine;
I kiss her rosy finger-tips; she smiles;
The rays of April's daisies, in their wiles
Bedazzling, are not whiter than those pearls
Bejewelling her bud-pink mouth; two worlds
Of blue her eyes; two dewy violets
The lids; the lashes' fringed-curtain lets

Out languid lights; her damask cheeks aglow,
Are rosy-petals fallen on the snow;
Her red lips laugh to scorn the poppy blow;
And fields of golden daffodils in spring,
Shifting their hues as in the breeze they swing,
Flaunt not such glorious tones as can compare,
With the abounding sunshine of her wavy hair;
The fragrant curls in tangled masses 'scape
Entrancingly adown the neck's white nape,
Disdaining their confining crown, which Mars
Had envied—set with jewels like the stars.

I stood bewildered in her awesome presence;
But having made my deep obeisance,
The Goddess bids me rise; with gentle wave,
Motions her page, a clove-pink little knave,—
Who on a pearl-embossèd cushion holds
The fairy key of vines and leavèd scrolls,
Which opes the doors of her enchanting isle.
This sweetly she presents to me—the while
Blushing, I stammer, “O your Majesty,
This honor,—” but, full feat and graciously,
Dismisses she my proffered gratitude,
Pointing to where four stalwart slaves, bronze-hued,

With skins of pard slung 'cross their shoulders nude,
Awaited me, beside a sedan-chair
Of sandal-wood, and ivory carvings rare,
Inlaid with precious Indian pearls. Her sweet
Behest obey I, and accept the seat
Tendered to me; straightway, I 'm borne aloft
Amid huzzas; reclining on the soft
Beflowered satin, I nod the admiring throng:
It is a signal for a burst of song,
And Lydian music, and the glittering train
In martial pomp moves on. Full soon, we gain
The city gate 'fore which I gape amazed!
'Tis intertwined wistaria, gold-emblazed;
Hand-forged the blossoms in enamelled hues,
So living beautiful, one cannot choose
But tempt to pluck them; 'mid the entwining vines
Innumerable exotic birds, whose color blinds,
Seem on the wing, as in an aviary fair
Of trelised gold, and weave the screen with rare
Refulgence. 'Tis the wonder-work, weird, vast,
Of gnostic artisans. A sennet's blast,
Silverly prolonged, enthrills the silence; lo,
The gate with sudden instinct opens slow,
And with a magic musical, upon

Its hinges; then anew we hasten on.
Triumphantly we enter Flora's walls,
Whose garden-esplanade at once enthrals
The eye,—where flowers, which should their vigils keep
Seem now to hang their heavy heads in sleep;
But as we pass, they lift their tired petals,
And sigh so, that a shower of perfume falls
Upon 's, and I, well-nigh of sweetest pain
Expire.

Now, once within the flowery domain,—
Ah, then the o'erwhelming beauty of the scene
With planetary force compounds to wean
The mind from sense. I see, as in a dream,
What oft I dreamed to see, but dared not deem
My fortunate stars would lift these mortal clods:
In sooth, a faery-city of the gods;
With fanes to Ceres raised, where orisons
Besiege fond Nature's ear; with Pantheons,
Where Flower-Heroes live immortalized;
With noble aqueducts ambrosialized
By crystal streams from Arethusa bright;
With isles enflowered, and sunken gardens dight;
With palaces of ivory and gold,

Outrivaling the Acropolis tenfold,
Or temples famed, which o'er Tarpeia sheer,
By Tiber's banks, eternal heads uprear.
Softly o'er all the opal moonlight stole;
And chastely as the bridal gloriole
It glowed, which Gaea, the tender virgin, wore,
When she to Heaven was wed: and rising o'er
The luminous mists that wreath the encircling hills,
The glistening columns, domes, and towers, guilds,
And mansionries of carved Pentelic 'pear
Kissing the clouds, or melting in the clear
Star-galaxies above, so that one wondered,
Where heaven 'gan or earth; or, if dissundered,
Then 't was a faery-city, part celestial;
Some Master-builder's dream imperishable;
Where stone on stone, in strange harmonious desire,
Had reared themselves in beauty, whilst on 's lyre
Amphion sang in ecstasied delight.

We wander on as in the meads of light,—
As in Elysium, where live the blest;
And all is hushed and in devotional rest,
As though the sanctity of beauty moves
The soul to inward worship, and to loves

Too sempiternal for ephemeral hours;
Save that from nodding fields of ghostly flowers,
There faintly falls upon the ear the drone
Of insects, as they chant in monotone
Their vesper-songs; and, ever and anon,
Blithe Philomel, to her pomegranate gone,
Seeking her love, but finds her flown,—too late,—
In liquid golden notes calls to her mate,
Thrilling the veil of night with melody!
Thou carolling spirit of love! Call'st thou to me?
O bliss, fore'er to linger 'mong the flowers,
One's only friends, nor feel the pain that lowers
The brow into each dark and wrinkled line!
Here perfect truth, and love, and duty shine;
In sun-blazed raiment of Hyperion,
Frightening the soul with loveliness, or spun
In mazeful kirtles, and in starry shoon,—
Or simple silvery livery of the moon;
Here beauty never dies—'t is spring alway;
Death is unknown, or blight, or winter's fray,
Aeolian blast, or autumn's sere decay;
Here all 's sweet life, soft ease, rich fruitfulness.
O here, then, would I stay, and dream,—no less
Than an eternity would be too short,—

And love some lady fair of Flora's court,
Whose sweetness heavy-lades the air entire,
As with the incense of her heart's desire.

We entered now an avenue of trees,
Of poplars tall; their boughs,—with broideries,
Flickering pale like frightened maidens' cheeks,—
Uplifted heavenward; 't is quiet; no one speaks;
I look for my good Virgil—he is gone;
I 'm with the Goddess and her train alone—
Ready no doubt for heavenlier guidance grown.
Into more shadowy deeps of arching leaves,
My swart-skinned Ethiops press; where 'neath the eaves
Of the arborous dusk Titania glorifies
Her day, by massing starry fireflies,
Her minions, into molten globules, hung
At intervals along the way; and strung,
Like fairy lanterns for a royal fête,
Shine iridescent glowworms, who dilate
Bravely their luminous bodies, till these bowers,
Gnomed by the owlet night, glisten with showers
Of radiance, so like day, that in amaze
The song-birds wake to greet us with their lays.
All 's redolent with scents to me for years

Forgot—whose memories to mine eyes bring tears;
Thwart which, I see the “Scarlet Runners’” ears
Aflame, pricked up to catch at better angles
Our progress; and the “Ragged Locks,” their tangles
Superbly tossed, like schoolgirls from a lark.—
At length, emerging from the verdurous dark,—
As Orpheus from the Shades, beheld at last
The glad Avernian vales,—I stand aghast,
Bedazzled, to see a palace heavenward rise,
Unutterably beautiful; its size
Unrivalled by those splendors, which for miles
Pavilion Phoebus in his Western Isles.
It is the Goddess’ divine demesne!
’T is all of gold, bedight with gems that e’en
Their flames scintillant dart to the flooding moon;
Rubies, and sapphires, pearls, carbuncles, strewn
With largesse inconceivable by man;
With chrysolites ablaze, and domes that span
Its ocean vastness, arched in rainbow-wise,—
And steps that seem to lead to Paradise.

The Apollonian blackamoors now lower
Their precious burden, their sweet Queen. Not slower
Am I to hasten from my littered chair,

To assist her to alight. She gems the air
With loveliness, and her adoring train
In widening cirque retire; their voices wane
Melodiously fainter in the enclosing night;
Lute-sighs grow softer, and the lyre's might
Impassioned trembles to wane minstrelsy;
The cymbal-players' notes float off to die,
Where Echo sits and mourns; the seraphims,
And dancing-girls, compose their rhythmic limbs,
'Neath veils that limn their perfect loveliness;
Whilst on their bosoms, soft and blemishless
As Horeb's snows, and rising with the thrill
Exultant of the dance, they try to still
Their trembling tambourines.— The general will
To deferently homage pay their Sovereign,
Now prompts the ladies and the liegemen in
Her train to reverently remain aloof,
Save those few favorites who, by time's strong proof,
Love warrants that they stay, full dotingly
To wait upon her trivial wants,—and me,
Prince Fortunatus:—all the rest withdraw.
I now approach her august presence with awe;
I sink upon one knee, veiled in eclipse
Mine eyes. There breaks forth from her rosy lips

A gracious smile, like to the iris light,
Herald of early dawn. O luckiest wight!
Feel'st not those flower-fingers touch thy hand,
Quivering the depths of all thy being, and
O'erpowering speech? Now mine eyes unveil,
To slake my thirst at nature's nonpareil
Of majesty,—and love broods in my heart.—
With movement light as when the lithe young hart
Springs forth from covert toward the mountain rills,
Or moon-beams gliding o'er the lush-green hills,
Her fairy-footsteps scorn the mossy earth,
Spread richly o'er with cloth-of-gold. No dearth
Lacks here of sovereignty, though eased its law.
Full soon, she stands, enpanoplied in awe
Majestical, where but a Goddess dares,
Upon her sacred temple's steps; and wears
The magic mystery of the heavenly night
About her; and, as in a dream's dazed sight,
I watch her wave her willing maids away:
The royal train may come as best they may;
Then, turning toward me with the imperious toss
Of sovran graciousness, which I 'm at loss
To fathom, bids me on. I go with glee,
Yet shrouded in exceeding mystery;

My heart aflame with strangely sweet emotions;
But for the fair love laughs at pathless oceans!

We scarcely seem the golden steps to graze,
But wafted are in cloud-like amber haze,
As on the wings of golden butterflies.
Our path is blazed by star-lit phantasies;
We speed o'er flights of terraced walks, and sail
Past flowering meads, and murmuring fountains pale
With dripping moonlight; gardens, trembling fair,
Shedding rare incense in the pendulous air;
Past brodered knots, and past long vistas green,
With royal palms that plume their honor e'en
As high as heaven; here a bright lagoon,
Mirrors the sward, with Phidian marbles strewn.—
While all enraptured to the skies we mount,
Mine eyes must needs drink deep at beauty's fount;
Such beauty-draughts as would a god make whole,
If one could weave such beauty in the soul,
As from the sea the sun's seductive rays
Unwreath the sapphire clouds. As my fixed gaze
The Deity feels upon her vermeil cheek,
She turns to me, and gently 'gins to speak,
In balm-sweet words, that bud 'mid witching smiles,

And thrill my heart as April's sunny wiles,
Revivify the floweret's drooping brow.

“O Mortal, favored of thy fellows, thou!
For from thy gross unpurgèd sphere of earth,
No froward denizen of doomful birth,
Hath dared imprint a clayey foot in this
Our flowery realm; wherefore, 't is not amiss
Thou learn'st, that in degree above thy kind,
Shalt thou, vouchsafèd by the gods, here find
A pilgrim's stay in a forbidden land;
And with the spirits of my immortal band
Untrammelled converse hold; and thou mayst hope,
And presently, unprecedented scope
Of our fair temple's inmost sanctuary:
And for thou ever didst the paths of beauty
Tread and retread within thy nether world,
Thou 'lt even the daughters of our house, impearled
Within our temple's holy shrine, glimpse o'er
A fleeting space, to worship and adore,—
Learning the pure delight man may attain
In beauty paradisial; thy pain,
Remembering that thou 'rt mortal, tarrying here
An instant's breath, with spirits of a sphere,

Freer, eternal, and to rarer ways
Attuned than thou, whose cloven-hoof bewrays
What race claims thee. We flourished ere the first
Parental sin cast thee, for aye accurst,
Thine extinct orb terrestrial to trod
In role of darkly groping demi-god.
And since it is the fiat fixed by Fate,
That mortal and immortal cannot mate,—
No more than metal can assimilate
With air,—therefore forget it to thy woe!
Dare not the blind boy Eros with his bow,
A golden shaft to thunder at thy breast;
Nor sigh the bud of love to burgeon, lest
Thou weary ages ere it flower,—its root
Sicklied to ashes like the Dead-Sea fruit;
While thou more fond than pale Narcissus gloat
Upon a gleaming shadow to the dote
Of madness driven and a fell despair.”

She paused, and sighed,—a tribute unaware
Perchance to Zephyrus,—and seemed, forsooth,
To pity me. I, blushing at the truth
Clamant, replied as one whom love o’erpowers:
“Belovèd Mistress of these fairy bowers,

Thou bidd'st the heart, more liberal than the wind,
Freer than airy birds home-nests to find
In skiey eerie or in cavern's mouth;
When clouds are sneaping cold to woo the south;
More unconfined than the unchained deep;
Less fettered than the silvery lives that creep
In her unbottomed vast abyss,—I say,
Thou bidd'st it to a task it will not weigh!
Impossible from sovereignty thou move
The heart to slavery in its realms of love!
In those illimitable regions where
It will be happiest,—for full soon 't is there
'T will gravitate; if there 's no reason to it—
Still is it sweetest even when time to rue it.
For Love's the master-spirit of the world,
Of heaven and earth! Man, maid, beast, bird, all hurled
Before his golden trumpet blast, to throng,
Mortal and immortal, toward his song,—
Which sweetly in Olympus weaves its spell,
As in the flowered meads of Asphodel;
Or in the plains Elysian: I do fear,
Lady, it turns the axis of thy sphere;
And, mortal though I be, Queen, Hyaline,
My soul doth for a love immortal pine,—

Ay, panteth ever. Know, my earth-born love
Is dead,—nay, Was it love? or not above
Platonic? Am I false? O, is it wrong,
That fain am I to list love's siren-song?
No! Where the sovran-queen of beauty's throned
Must Cupid worship; and, in sooth, though zoned
With curtains were the windows of my soul,
Naught 't would avail; armed gods cannot control
What beauty's eyes compel!" I stopped; aloof
I stood, as with pursed lips in sweet reproof,
The Goddess spake:

"We shall not toy with truth:

Alas, I see thine eyes are glazed, fond youth;
Ay, filmèd o'er like all thy temporal race;
Thou canst not see beyond the fortelace
Of beauty's brave domain. What thou call'st love,
Is but the fluttering of the mourning-dove
Within thy heart's soft cote; or senses sick;
Such love, but beauty-born, O fleeteth quick,
As snow-wreaths melt in brawling mountain-brooks,
When blackbirds chirrup from their leafy nooks,
Warm summer-time is nigh. True love's begot
In Hymen's treasure-trove; the golden-knot
There forged for pairing souls from birth of Dawn;

And from the dreamful planets are they drawn;
And from the stars they issue, seeking one
The other, in strange mystic mazes dun;
In wandering circles, like pale spirits lost,
Crying aloud, where wildernesses crossed,
For one they love, to meet, and to assuage
The eternal yearning and their torment's rage:
And, when they meet, they into love's white star
Melt all anew, while pain and anguish are
Appeased forever and sweet solace 't is,
In everlasting and a day-long bliss.
So, in thy days, fond youth, remember this:
The soul doth shine continual as the sun,
Behind the clouds that thou dost gaze upon;
Wherefore gape not o'erwrought in ecstasy,
On every vermeil cheek where roves the eye;
First seek the soul beyond the azure lid;
'T will like the sun illumine all though hid;
And mark—the timorous violet, which sighs
Her sweets unseen in simple modesties,
May prove more constant than that Empress stately,
The Crown Imperial, in full gorgeous livery.
Beauty is oft a rose-lipped empty shell,
Which echoes but the roaring ocean's swell,

Recording not the love the heart could tell.”
Thus charged the Goddess, and she turned from sight
Her glorious orbs, which left the widowed Night
To keep me woful company; and forthright
We sped; and, in my heart, as in a shrine,
I sought her hidden meaning to divine.

Now in the moonlight pale as chrysoprase,
At last alight we at her gates ablaze
With rubies rare and jewels of the Ind,—
Which, like the golden grain before the wind,
At Flora’s soft behest retire themselves
On golden lyre-sweet hinges, as if elves
Informed them; and we pass within; and then,
Through mazes of enchanting chambers, when
We reached a richly vaulted banquet-hall,—
The genius of Ictinus in its thrall,—
Flung open to the azure cool of night;
So that the o’erarching heavens at this height,
Meseemed its cerule, starry-studded dome.
Pale perfumed tapers through the violet gloam,
Cast soft caressing shadows; objects, faint
As though one darkly on a picture quaint
Stood gazing, dimly ranged themselves about;

All scarce discerned, till by the light's slow rout,
The eye more friendly with the darkness grew,
Disclosing lothly to the enravished view,
The loveliest group of maidens fair, reclining,
In Roman fashion, on soft couches, shining
With broideries rare of jewels and of gold;
Like unto Graces seven,—and more high-souled
Than were the Three,—divinely clustered round
Low tables pearl inlaid and flower-crowned:
The walls were hung with rich-wrought tapestries
From ancient Persia, telling wondrous stories
In colors rivalling the rainbow's hues—
How Ariadne from the labyrinth's mews,
Led forth her captive lord,—alas, her woes!—
And faithless lover: from jewelled censers rose
Curled silver clouds of frankincense deft-mingled
With myrrh, so pungent, that the senses tingled;
And from the loft o'erhead, as from a near
Olympus, falls upon the enraptured ear
The music of celestial quires, faint,
Methinks, as that first morn, when love's constraint,
Bursting its bonds, the spheres began their song
In joyous jubilation 'fore the throng
Seraphic of the gods, to tent their forces

In new-created and eternal courses:
On richly laden boards, in clustering piles,
Fruits mellowed 'neath Pomona's rubious smiles,
Lay heaped, and there had spillèd high, good Ceres,
Her plenteous horn; and there were cornel-berries,
Coral-red,—with sun-kissed olives, wise
Minerva's gift,—beside food of the skies,
Ambrosia, fragrant for ensainted lives,—
And honey from far Hybla's sacred hives:
In bay-wreathed flagons wine of Bacchus flared,
Like bedded rubies that had Sol ensnared;
And golden nectar glowed in golden cups,
Entwined with lotus-buds—for him who sups
To taste of dreamy Lotus-land, and press
The quivering lips in sweet forgetfulness
Of teen and tears, when teasing Memory nods;—
Ah, sooth, here was a feast fit for the gods!

And when fair Flora, Berylline, appears
Upon this scene Saturnian, dulcet cheers
Thrill forth her beauteous daughters, and they rise
Heart-glad to greet her. But it is nowise
The same, when mortal I stand 'mid these maids:
It is as when a sparrow-hawk invades

The peaceful cooing dove-cote; now 't would seem
The Prince of Consternation reigns supreme
In 's sway, till, taking each one to her breast,
The Queen assures her fledgling birds the nest
Is safe, and then, she mothers each young miss
Caressingly, as one doth fondly kiss
A tender flower; for they, in sooth, are flowers—
The blessèd Flower-Princesses, whose dowers
Are an eternal loveliness; whose course
On earth well-run, did mark the joyous source
Whence they were crowned immortal; for they never
Were wanton with their sweetness, but did ever
Unto the water-lily, Nymphia, who
Guardeth the gate of Paradise, give true
Account of odors rare, and deep desire
To keep the beauty of their soul's attire.

To me each one her spirit's charm, her grace,
Her virtues are extolled, as one might trace
In flower-hues a glorious garden's lure.
There is Viola, modest and demure;
She was Ianthus, whom Apollo loved,
And as a floweret, in the vales removed
From searching gazes of the god, she laid

Her sweet self shyly in the empurpled shade,
And sighed pale kisses to the enamoured air.
Then Lilith, slender, stately, tall, and fair,
With cheeks of virgin snow and heart of gold;
In that first garden of the world the mould
Of airy grace; ay, there she reigned in glory,
Ere any woman known in rhyme or story;
A woman crowned with honey-colored hair,
Enhaloed, chaste as Dian's brow,—more fair.
Beside her, robed as in a crimson cloud,
That shames the deep pomegranate red, the proud,
Imperious Amaryllis sits enthroned;
Disdainful one! thy conquests are unmoaned,
Brief-lived, like fiery blossoms that exhale
Their spirits even as they bloom death-pale.
And gazing through the casement languorously,—
Which opens toward the starry eastern sky,—
I see Clytia, with the dreamful eyes,
Pale sister of Leucothoe, whose ties
Of blood played false. Love-lorn! Look'st for thy star?
Alas, then, pineth still for him, whose car
Of flaming jasper lingers at the gate
Of roseate morn, unmindful of thy fate?—
Then, there's the messenger, to Jove heart-dear,

Ethereal Iris, bearer of good cheer
To mourning mortals; she, who came to grim,
And agèd, broken Priam, urging him
To ransom home the godlike Hector's corse;
Resplendent in all hues, she holds discourse
With Asphodel, the frail, of amber hair,
The friend of sad Persephone,—the pair
Seeming to mingle fondest memories—
The one of fields of light, the other's eyes
With weeping wan, long for the Shades, whose cries
Floated about her in the vales beyond,
Where runs the darkling river Acheron.
There, too, is Dryope, in parti-colors;
Pale Primrose, where the scarlet Poppy hovers,
As if to win her from her evening lovers.
All these and more delight the enravished eye;
A simple glance reveals each one to me;
For I behold, as in a dreamful bower,
A Maiden fair where there 's a fairy Flower,—
A Flower, rosy-bosomed, wheresoe'er
There is a Maiden: 't is a garden, where
Each Flower-maid grows fairer as I gaze;
I think myself within some mirrored maze,
Where Beauty's self reflecteth Beauty's mate;

Where Paris had a task Herculean great,
To weigh at once such deal of loveliness.

But there is one whose beauty's high noblesse,
Outshines her mates as matchless Hesper shames
His sister-stars. From first she solely claims
The Goddess of the Flower's passion,—whiles
'Tis all from her she kindleth her bright smiles:
It is Rhodanthe, the flower-miracle,
The Rose, superb, tall, lithe, ethereal,
Who from sheer beauty droops in pink alarms,
For from all roses hath she filched the charms!
O hundred-leavèd, richest, rarest blown,
Ever in magic Persian garden known;
Whose splendor pranked the proud'st Circassian brow,—
Never didst thou that pearled seraphic glow
E'er match, which like the auroral dawn on peak
Of snow, mantles this maiden's milk-white cheek!
When to the stricken Adonais flew
The beauteous Cypris through the meadow-rue,
'Tis said she trod upon a pale white rose;
By chance a jealous thorn, quick to oppose
His tender charge, stole from the paragon
Of womankind some ruby drops, upon

The moment's spur, with which to peerless deck
His pallid paramour—and from this fleck
Incarnadine was born the roseal hue,
Which tints Rhodanthe's soft velvet cheek:—and true
Alike, 't is told, the Antheian, as she mourned
The wounded son of Myrrha, love adorned
His corse with beauty on its lush green bier;
Each blood-drop bloomed a rose, each Paphian tear
Sprung heavenward a frail Anemone;
And as the goddess gazed and tried to stay
His sphere's smile, he melted from her view,
While from his body's golden blood there grew
Myriads of purple flowers.— But 't is of you,
Rhodanthe, sweet rose, that I would tune my lays!
O bird Maeonian, teach me sing the praise
Of her, the maid amid that flowery maze!
O temples whiter far than Tabor's snows!
Like living Parian thy virgin-bosom rose
And fell; like jewelled crown of topaz bright
Glisten thy golden tresses in the night;
And in the azure-light of thy dear eyes,
Shineth the glory of the noon-day skies;
And in thy ravishing smile, the onlooker blinds,
As from the lightning of a soul, which finds

The excess celestial 'scape life's earthly mask—
O frail Moeonian bird, thou fail'st thy task—
Alas, it *was* too much of thee to ask!

In fixèd madness lost, my bold intrusion,
So thoughtless, covers her with sweet confusion,
As though a placid soul, 'fore love's affright,
Is bathed all o'er in rosy crystal light;
And I,—who, but a fleeting space, o'erborne
On passion's pinions to the empyreal bourne
Of Flora, by the love-god's blandishments,—
Now in the toils of other ravishments
Beheld myself,—and in the kingdom stood,
Of all that breathes of beautiful and good,
By love dreamed, fadeless fair as amaranth,
Enthronèd in bright-aureoled Rhodanthe!
And, like a pent-up storm, which night enshrouds,
With groaning rages in the laboring clouds,
Forecasted by the fitful lightning's flashes,
At last, unleashed, in fury fiercely crashes
Thorough the flood-gates of the skies afire,
And mercilessly beats with scourges dire
The unhappy face of nature,—my spirit lorn,—

Which ever seemed to nurse a love unborn,—
Dreaming of dreams, ethereal and eternal,
But never seemingly attainable,
Through all the lashing tempest-time of youth,—
Now swift the current feels of love's sweet truth
Impulsive sweep all barriers away,
And pour o'er pied and lilied runnels gay,
In frenzied and ungovernable bliss,
Enamelling the world with daedal artifice,
In fairy likeness of Hesperian Fields!
Now thrilled with all the emotions young love yields;
Now icèd with the fear of scorn; now wild
To woo this being frightened as a child,
At heavenly-wingèd love; now all afire
To face for her fell Ate's perils dire;
Or for her sake, with Phaeton's bribery,
To scale the heights of heaven's empery;
It matters not,—naught is impossible—
Her magic soul casts o'er me such a spell!
I have no eyes for any other maid;
My heart like reaper's flail against the blade
Beats loudly. Love! an thou wouldst but distil
Thyself in honey-dew, this heart to still
From hunger, and from such a thirst divine!—

I move toward her—but she makes no sign;
I seek to take her tender hand in mine,
As might a gallant kiss it—but, in fine,
She quick recoils, as doth the sweetly proud
Mimosa, when a wisp of fleecy cloud
Veils o'er the sun; and I am nigh to tears;
But now fair Flora, Berylline, appears
Near us, nor sheds forbearing pity upon
My woe; softly, "Fie, fickle Corydon,"
She saith, "thou find'st thy dainty Phyllis smile
In every passing eye,—two to the mile!
A Bella-donna first with orbs of blue,
What Black-eyed Susan next art thou to woo?"
She thus the amorous oeillades remembers
With which I plied her—ay, the merest embers
Of what ne'er waxed in flames. Nay, my poor heart
Wots well it never loved till now; the smart
Prodigious sweet proclaims Love's power; and while
Proud Flora rules as Goddess of the Isle,
Rhodanthe o'er all the flowers reigneth Queen!
And if my wilding fancy's flight had e'en,
Like dizzy moth, round Circe's flame in rings
Careened, it had not singed its star-dust wings,
But breathless panteth at Rhodanthe's small feet.

The Goddess 'midst her darlings takes her seat,
Bidding me feast with them, and I comply,
My pulses all a-tremble. Though I try,
I can't but feel my bodily tenement,
Gracelessly flounders in a rarer element
Than is its wont—and with lack-lustre wars
Against a brilliant galaxy of stars.
I taste of wine—of sparkle there 's no trace,
For gazing on Rhodanthe's entrancing face,
I long to sip the nectar of her lips—
No Feast-King nigh my soul's bright thirst to eclipse!
A crook-kneed Ethiop, in solemn state,
Of heavenly ambrosia on a golden plate
Presents me—but this far-famed food of gods
Tastes vapid, stale; and, faith, with all the odds
Against me, liefer had I backed my soul
To feed on the air, that musk-sweet aureole,
Which from her being is exhaled; or free,
To lose itself for an eternity
Amid the scented tangles of her hair!—
What feast, when in your heart a desert bare
Looms up; and when an arid waste enclips
Poor nomad Cupid, and his dust-dry lips
Athirst, would slake them at love's bubbling springs!

When lo! with throbbing of his heart's bright wings,
He dreams he sees there in the oasis above,
The cool, sweet, crystal plashing fountain of love
At last!—to find it all a phantom fade
Away before his eyes. O will this maid
So glorious, this Rhodanthe, prove to my fall
A false mirage? No, no! She smiles, and all
The sandy desert blooms! My sunless years,—
My starless nights,—my silent bitter tears—
Were not in vain! nay, they were happy years,
And starry nights, and laughing, gladsome tears;
For they at last my pilgrim steps have led,
Through briary paths, through blinding mists, storm-fed,
To her bright throne, the lady of my dreams!

BOOK II

The feast is o'er. We rise, we two, the extremes
Of light and life, Rhodanthe and I—yet seems
One bond our souls in unison to stir.
Oblivious to all the world, I wander with her
Into the casement window's snug embrasure;
The dulcet music of the aërial choir
Lends wings to love; my lips alone lack fire.
Amphion, grant one heart-sigh of thy lyre
Divine, that I may wake the slumbering Cupid
Becharmèd, in this roseate bosom hid!
I 'gin to sing; the strain despairing dies
As doth a Lydian song:—my lady's eyes,
Seeming their wistful loveliness to span
Even unto the bright Aldebaran,
Shineth amid the stars. Thus I began:

“Beauteous Rhodanthe, O list to me!

Ere thou adorned the garden of the world,

I loved thee,—ay, from all eternity!
As in the shell the ocean is impearled,—
As mountains long to kiss the shining cloud,
As rivers love the sea,
And florets to the sun bare bosoms proud—
So I was drawn to thee—
My love-wings in thy heart forever to enshroud.

“A dreaming, wondering, worshipping boy,
I wandered sadly o’er the gorse-starred downs,—
As Io tortured—in a search for joy—
For thee. Thy name ’mong castellated towns
I called—’mid plains, and every pelting hill-top;
And with the sighing pine,
And with the waterfall’s endiamond drop,
And wind in Apennine,
I cried for thee, nor dared my soul in fear to stop.

“But with the throe of sobbing rain,
I mingled my pale symphonies of song,
Till in the night ’mid rhapsodies of pain,
The tender birds in pity quired along;
And Nature’s listening heart throbbed silently,
Her own soft music stilling,

To hear celestial anthems praising thee,
 Like hymns of dew distilling
From heaven upon her from sweet bowers of ecstasy.

“Beloved, come o’er the hills away,
 Where we can love in dells of liberty;
Untrammelled aye, forever and a day,
 By tilt and artifice of man—soul-free!—
Into the laughing valleys, flower-starred,
 Where blithe Aurora trips
In roseal sandals o’er the daisied sward,
 Bedabbled eyes and lips
With wistful dew to greet the day’s advancing guard.

“Beyond the sun-kissed hills of light,
 Cloud-capped, into the smile-wreathed valleys, where,
With iridescent flowering jewels bedight,
 Enthroned, thou ’lt queen it o’er all beauties rare:
And Spring at sight of thee shall bloom away;
 And Love shall know no rue;
And Time shall pass us by upon the way;
 And in thy voice I ’ll woo
The airs of Helicon and sing the live-long day.

“Come let ’s away! Yon is the goal!

Far from walled towns and battlemented towers,
That straitly cabin the heaven-aspiring soul;

And with the intrepid lark’s aërial powers,
Through pathless skies we’ll wing our blithesome flight;

O’er crags and billowy main,
And eerie cliffs, around whose dizzy height

The sea-mews cry in pain,
And tortured Ocean moans throughout her sleepless night.

“O leave the gilded halls of ease,

Where Sloth, envisaged in her hollow mask;
Where Vanity and Pleasures, reeked with lees,

In stuffed cothurnus strut athwart their task,—
Across their brief and narrow earthly stage;

Still thinking with their base,
Sepulchral voice to tease the flippant age

Into a happier race,
And shame old theories with their barbèd persiflage.

“Ah, no! the Dorian ring of joy

They cannot simulate,—nor thrill the being
To heights of high resolve,—with false alloy:

They mock at Time and Truth’s full, sweet congreeing!

So let 's away, Belovèd, let 's away,—

We two and Love alone,

Beyond the ken of man and his dull day,

Beyond his little zone,

Beyond his pigmy dreams of the old Utopia.

“The feast forego, Love, for a pot

Of greeny, tender herbs; the wine for water

From Ida's cooling streams; and it thy lot,

These flowering robes of Flora's regal daughter,

To exchange for simple weaves thine own fair hand

Shall fashion from the flax;

Then shall our myrtle tree of love expand,

Even to heaven, and wax,

Till in its starry blossoms the turtle shall bless the land.

“Till in its blossoms, that star the night,

The turtle's cooing notes shall breathe of peace,

Forever and a day. O take thy flight

With me, Beloved, to win fore'er surcease

Of sorrow from life's glittering eye-bite dross;

From clinking compliment,

So empty, of the Janus-faced, whose cross

Triples man's discontent,

And dooms communing hearts to their eternal loss!

“Fly to the free, illimitable air!

Where Jove’s blue dome shall canopy our heads;
His emeralds ’neath our feet; for matin-prayer

The choiring throistles, that watch our flowered beds;
While nightingales our wandering footsteps charm,

Whither the pomegranate-tree
O’erspreads her blossoms to keep us from all harm,
Blossoms of purity,
Like thine—thy soul, thy temples, and white dazzling arm.

“O Love, we ’ll glory on the way

Of Life, which leads unto the way Eternal;
And feed our souls against the immortal day,

With rare ambrosia of sweet dreams supernal:
We ’ll feast whene’er the woodbine nods her bells;

And slake our mortal thirst
From sweet Hymettian bees’ most luscious cells,
O’erbrimming nigh to burst,
In tawny cowslip cups plucked in fair fairy dells.

“Then, when the Vesper hour fades

Into the glowing twilight deeps of even;
And Cynthia in her car, o’er cloud-worn grades,

Wheels through the golden patined road of heaven,—

We 'll seek our bower, and live to all unknown,
Save to the ecstasy
Of twin-souls melting in night's purple zone,—
To love eternally.”

Thus sang I to Rhodanthe, free, unafraid;
Thus, rapt in adoration of this maid,—
Whose beauty, like a glimpse of Paradise,
Enraptured all my senses, stole mine eyes,
O'erthrew all nice reserve of manliness,
Save uncontrolled desire to possess
Such charms, ne'er poet dreamed or painter limned,—
I poured my whole soul out to her: then, dimmed
And faint, as though by Cupid slain, I smart;
The ruby drops gush from my wounded heart;
I cease all speech; and like a slave, in gloom,
Condemned, slow counting his impending doom,
I wait with 'bated breath my life's eclipse;
I wait the faintest tremor of those lips,
Which curved into a rose-bud wet with dew,
Seem prone to blossom in a smile, or two;
Or, gods forbid! to fade into a frown.
She looks at me, then at the stars—then down;

Then all but veined lids are veiled from me—
Then silence yokes us with eternity.

Again her light cerulean on me steals—
I drink like one whose brain already reels,
The intoxicating glances of those eyes,
Whose curtained lids had caused the agonies
Untold of Stygian night on me to fall,—
Now oped, prove heralds of the morn's sweet thrall.
I watch her as a muezzin from the tower,
Who, in his lonely vigil's keep, the hour
Perceives at hand, when Dawn, with banners bright,
Proclaims the coming pageantry of light,—
Then calls his dreaming populace to prayer.
O now for me is rived the tenebrous air;
The erstwhile lurid world in blossomings
Of orient pearls and roses blithely sings!
For lo! Rhodanthe, even with the gentlest sigh,
Riseth—each movement music to the eye,—
And looking full at me, so that I feel
Immersed in clouds of blue, so deep the appeal,
So tender shone the gaze of those soft sweet
Sapphiric orbs,—that ne'er in man's conceit
The like was ever seen,—she held toward me

Her tapering little hand: I still can see
Its glow of sea-shell pink, its mould—'t would tease
To infinite despair Praxiteles,
So exquisite it is!—and then, methought,
She smiled a wistful wish, ay, even besought
That I should follow her,—then moved away—
So slightly—then, as sudden as a ray
Of moonlight, which a cloud will all engloom—
She melted like a vision from the room.
While I, half-dazed, bewitched, all wonderingly,—
Paying, indeed, the scantest courtesy
To Goddess Flora, and her daughters fair
Abruptly left behind,—I, in despair,
Fly like a hart that panteth for the clear,
Cool fountains, in a feverish quest and fear,
To find my dear Rhodanthe, now flown I know
Not whither.

I, from room to room, tiptoe
With wings of haste—then list,—then, in the lull,
Awake the dormant echoes in the dull,
Dark arras folds with sounds of her sweet name.
Again, again, I call, my heart aflame
With fearfulness, lest I my lady's sight

Have lost fore'er—; half-guided by a bright,
Celestial aura in her path diffused,
Whilst goaded on by perfumed airs confused,
That amorously linger in her wake.
I reach a noble flight of stairs; I take
Its lead; 't is all of marbles carvèd rare;
'T is ominous—but still I take its dare!
Down it I speed—grim terror lending wings
To love. I come with awed imaginings
Upon a curious cloistered passage, and,
Alas, my forward way now ends: I stand
Confronted by a frowning iron gate.
Diana to my aid, I note its grate
Of metal scrolled and tortured into shapes,
So deft fantastic, as if demon apes
Had dreamed its dread design in deadly pain:
Its mastercraftsmanship of Tubal Cain,
No less,—and fashioned in the stithy-fane
Of fiery Vulcan, 'neath Mount Aetna's maw,
What time he would Aglaia's favor draw
To him. The forgèd ore contorted is
In forms of leaves and flowers; not fair as Dis
Frighted from Proserpine in Enna's vale,
But what rank foison reeks within the pale

Plutonian;—brambles, with their wan white rose,—
Bog-myrtles lush, and cockles, barbèd foes
Of plenty,—cypress curst, and sorrowing yew,
And prickly gorse without its golden hue,—
Dull mandragora, and marsh-marigold,
Enwoven with dark tufts of nettles bold;
Then, strange, a bush of hawthorn, bleak and bare,
Enwreathèd with acanthus; here and there,
Crushed myrtle sprigs nigh-clogged with briary thorn:
Thus serpent-wise to me within seems borne
This cryptic message in the foliage hid—
That in a world of doubt and darkness, 'mid
Unnumbered woes, ambition vaulting o'er
Innumerable obstacles—a little spore
Of love would soon be choked in fell despair
And death.— Instinctively, I, shuddering, dare
Advance no farther.

Nay, I, faltering, turn;
My spirit's depths in direst forebodings churn
At this ill omen,—but, at the memory
Of her, so ravishing, which beckons me—
And holds my utmost being in its thrall—
Half in a wild despair and bitter gall,
Thus balked; half to despite the gate, I call:

“Rhodanthe!” When lo, this talisman charms all
The air with an enchanting magic! ’fore
My dazèd eyes the black dead iron door,
With intergnarlèd shapes of vines and flowers,
Begins to stir apace with sudden powers,
Instinct of life, assuming tendrils warm
And soft and paly green, all nature’s charm
Of vernal tints; her tender buds blink eyes
From winter’s sleep; and where the tyrannies
Appeared before of tortured, twisted metal,
Now through the brackish mists that ’gin to settle,
Dissolving brightly as a springtide rain,
A tall enchanting hedgerow now has ta’en
Its place, all starred and pied in blossoms rare,
E’en like a gate of Paradise; and ere
The jealous thorns that scorn my zeal can tear
My flesh, I thrust the interlacing screen
Aside, and with a leap, I am within
The most bewildering garden-spot love’s eyne
E’er pictured in its dreams of bliss divine!

“O ’t is the Garden of Adonis!” I
Exclaim, as if such rare transcendent beauty
Beggared aught else: “Adon, thy bowers pied!

Where, in thy resurrection glorified,
The gods have made the Spring to bloom alway;
Where breathing odors from her isles of May,
Fair Cytherea comes smile-wreathed to stay,—
To gather rose-buds where thy life-blood sped,
And windflowers where thy dewy tears were shed!”
’Tis so, for everywhere with anadems
Encrowned of precious flowers, earth’s starry gems,
Eternal Spring, in parti-colored court,
Keeps her high carnival; ay, here, in short,
Lie her arch-revellers ’tired in every hue,
From flaming poppy and the hare-bell blue,
To snow-white of those sisters frail but true,
The lilies of the vale—each little hood
Asleep and bathed in shimmering moonlight flood.
Wondering, I take my way, all rainbow-stoled,
Midst daffodillies,—buttercups, pure gold,—
Inconstant tulips, whose ensanguined stain,
Flushed golden blood of Persian lovers slain;
Past stocks and gilliflowers,—my soul soars free
With fragrant memories of Araby!—
Here Cupid’s favorite, Love-in-Idleness,
Doth chaste-checked Dian’s bud in gentillesse
Caress: and, then, my varied way entwines

'Twixt pink and purple motleyed columbines,
Dreaming in drooping cap and tongueless bell,
Perchance of summer's follies:—in their cell,
A cowed community of monkshood tell
Their midnight rosaries, a-listening to
The blue-bells swinging in the close of yew
Hard-by; they think it is their monastery call
To vesper-prayers:—and gold-eyed daisies, all
In robes diaphanous of the silvery Moon,
Lie 'long my broidered path.— But I shall swoon
From heart-ache find I not, and that full soon,
The jewel of this setting fair, the Rose,
My wonder-eyed Rhodanthe! Will none disclose
Her hiding-place? “O Love-lies-bleeding, wilt,
I prithee, tell me where my Lady's built
Her bower invisible? I would keep tryst
With her!”—No answer—sad, I stooped and kissed
The starry petals of an eglantine,
Stopping an instant with her to repine
The loss of those who sang her praise, and grieve
She favors not all bards alike! I leave
To greet a wistful wan anemone,
Sighing where Zephyr wooed her cruelly;
Her glittering tinsel-veil all torn to shreds,

Lies where the Looking-glass of Venus spreads
Her mirrored maze; where rests her future path,
Cast forth from court by Flora's envious wrath.
But farther winds my walk. I now essay
What look like star-fields of the Milky-Way,
Where bloom primroses, white-faced, argent-locked,
In clouds ethereal vast, so that they mocked
My search; so on I press, Rhodanthe, for thee!
Flitting like night-moth toward thy flame-flowered tree:—
Lo, 'neath the shadowy boughs of claustral yews,
Which like the ominous pale of fate enmews
This vale of beauty, I espy weird gnomes,
And elfish creatures, gathering fadeless blooms—
Ah, these in their Egyptian darkness, do,
Conjointly with the Enchanter's Night-shade, brew,
With hemlock stalks, dread potions for false lovers!
Ah, not for me!

Thy face seraphic hovers
In the air, Rhodanthe, beloved, where'er, it seems,
I go! It lures me on—it mocks—it gleams,
Within each flowering maze; now here, now there,
It smiles me to come on,—O, wild despair!—
'Tis but the pink and white in fairy guise

Of clustering buds that plague my foolish eyes!
I call aloud her name,—'t is all in vain!—
But now a pleachèd pergola I gain,
O'er which the amorous woodbine interwove
A perfumed way to build a bower of love;
Beneath, young Adon's lovely statue's nighed;
While nearby sings a plashing fount, bewitched
To pour its lucent soul upon the enriched
Proud earth, in liquid diamonds: lo, upon
Its water-lilied marge—unhappy one!—
Behold Narcissus pale recumbent, he,
Who dared to shun the nymphs; his head, so lovely,
Droopeth upon his troubled breast; poor dream!
His smiling image taunts him in the stream,
Augmented by his tears. Alas, for thee!
'Tis thrice thy woe to read felicity
In water writ,—but what 's my fate now due,
Who sweet Rhodanthe's elusive love would woo?
And Echo, in what woody vale of sighs,
Wordless, bemoaneth thou with streaming eyes,
The shade of thy beloved? Shall I arise,
And go to thee, to weep eternal hours,
The loves that we have lost among the flowers?

Nay, not among Narcissi stays my love,
Of self enamoured; so, as Jason strove,
In golden search, the consecrated grove
To find, where blazed the fleece, I will pursue
Unplainingly my vexed but golden clue.
But, oh! what if some ogling water-god
Have seized thine image and with magic rod
Impressed thee, my Rhodanthe, to illumine his grot,
His crystal mine with thy bright eyes, begot
In heaven's effulgent blue! Ah, now, my woe,
My fears, 'fore every lovely flower grow,
If fountains smile at 's petal-broidered gown!—
Now trail I Smilax sad, where Crocus, crown
Bespangled, rears his pride, disdaining her,—
The sin which sealed their ruin; alas, it were
In vain: I here the world's assembled fair
Survey, save she I seek in fell despair,
The fairest in the world! Ah, an 't might be
She breathes a prisoner in these bowers of beauty!
To wander here, I 'm grateful evermore,
In the fluttering hope, which springs from dreaming o'er
That goal of pure delight, 'neath love's blithe spell,
Here in this earthly paradise to dwell
With her in an eternal bliss, alone;

And though unseen, yet not unheard, unknown:
I'll feel her presence in the moonlight stroll;
And in the perfumes sense her tremulous soul!
But an she love me not and would, despite
My life, forsake the roses and the light,
As there the scented Jessamine, upon
Yon cloister-wall, is clambering to be gone
Into the cold and cruel world without?
Ah, then, blind Fate, snatch me from hellish doubt!
Myself to subtle Hellebore translate,
That I may kill the flowers that I hate,
When my Rhodanthe lives here with them no more!
Or, let me, dying 'mid my dreams, heart-sore,—
Like yonder purple flower, which sprung, full-bloomed,
From out the blood of Hyacinth, addoomed
To death by Phoebus, who so loved the life
He hapless took,—a lesson teach full rife
Of transitory bliss and triumph frail,
To all who harken my unhappy tale.

And now, with bootless searching spent, at last,
As is the ship-wrecked mariner, who cast
Alone upon some unknown tropic shore,
Finds rare exotic blooms in glittering store

Plutonian, but no sign of human life,
His hungry heart desires in pulsing strife
To see,—I am about to vent my agony
Of infinite despair, when, suddenly,
O bliss! a thrill of golden music starts
The air in tremulous tuneful waves; it darts
Into the empyrean—I listen rapt—
The strain soars ever higher, as it had snapped
The very ears of sound,—up, up ascends,—
Till Philomel's full-throated sweetness rends
The veil of night with melody divine!
As 't were a signal of the tuneful Nine,
There bursts a flood of light in dazzling folds
Of brilliancy ineffable, which holds
My spirit spell-bound in a wonder-vise.
Constrained to think these signs some strange device,
Some joyous portent of the sentient world,
Which watches over my Rhodanthe, I hurled
Myself with frantic onward rush and glee,
Directed by the bird's shrill threnody,
Now driven to the ecstasy of pain.

There is a vista here, a fairy lane,
I had not seen, where tall, white lilies keep,

Like sainted sentinels, in legions deep,
A path which leads unto a rosy bower.
Along this hallowed way I haste—the shower,
Most mellow musical of Philomel,
Falling like summer's purple heather-bell,
By loving zephyrs scattered on the lea,—
And come to where a crimson nebulae,
Eye-dazzling vast, of roses, 'tired in hues,
Tenderly dewy as the stars diffuse,
Confronts me. O, in faith, it seemed earth's proud'st,
Supremest effort crowned, she had with loud'st
Acclaim ta'en up her fancy's brush to paint
This, Nature's page, in rioting unrestraint,
With thoughts of transcendental loveliness!
Then, pantingly, I stop in spirit to bless,
What 'peared a vision, strange, celestial,—
That might a dream prove, wild, fantastical,—
For in the midst of this enchanting throng
Of roses, all in adoration long
Prostrated, 'fore a dais raised among
The worshippers,—within a bower, where
The sweetest birds unnumbered filled the air
With dulcet minstrelsy,—and where the scent,
Dreamy with incense-breathing flowers bent

The willing winds with fraughtage,—ay, and where
The arrowy moonbeams shot their shafts most rare,
Illumining this wondrous sight beyond compare—
Lo, smiling at me sate Rhodanthe, the fair,
The incomparable She of heaven's perfect dower!
'T was scarcely clear if she were maid or flower,
Until her beatific countenance,
Irradiating its seraphic glance,
Revealed the rare resplendence of her face.
Ah, then,—as spirits of angelic grace,
From consort with the Infinite Good, ensainted,
Cast on us mortal creatures, sin-attainted,
Benign regard, and with a moiety
Of their sweet love for us, uplift us, lowly,
Unto empyreal heights,—so she, with one
Bewilderingly tender flash of the sun
Of all the beauty in her fierce control,
Stirred tremulous emotions in my soul,
Which like a wave recoiling shore on shore,
It feels that trembling impulse evermore!

Now throned in cloud-drifts of new-born delight;
Now dread-appalled lest from a Lotus-night
Of dreams I wake to find this is some wild,

Some archful Gnomide, incorporeal, or child,
Born of the soul's concentered fixed desire—
I, strangely awed, stared dazed, 'twixt frost and fire;
For if it stay a vision beautiful—
O let me then to dream continual!—
But, hark! unto mine ear floats music heavenly:
"What dost thou fear if that thou lovest me?"
Ye gods! Is 't she who speaks? What poesy,
Ecstatically sweet! What roses fell
From honied lips? O, like a golden bell,
My being vibrates with crescendoing swell
Of joy responsive! O, her words to me!
Leaving her nectared lips reluctantly,
As bees their hive of honied sweets: "Come, love,
Come sit with me, 't is I, Rhodanthe." "Great Jove!"
I cry, "Rhodanthe!" in boundless ecstasy;
And to her in the entangling flowers I fly,
To flounder in soft drifts of crimson snow.
O gods, that I should tremble when I know
She calls, whom I adore! "Rhodanthe!" I heard;
My pulses flutter like a timorous bird;
"Rhodanthe!" O, how her name even startles all
The world with rare new fragrance in its thrall:
"Rhodanthe! For thee, beloved, I 've suffered much;

Ay, sought for thee a thousand years!" I touch
Her tender hand, so flower-soft and warm;
It trembles as the aspen 'fore the storm:
"For thee, I've waited, love, always," she saith.
O, if it thrills the expanding bud, the wraith
Of the morning sun to feel in twinkling kisses
Upon her blushing cheek; if countless blisses
The murky forest's brooding heart encharms,
When in the night Diana's soft white arms
Encircle it,—then may it be conceived,
In measure, what wild ecstasies were weaved
And intertissued in my trancèd soul,
When 'thwart its deep-set and nocturnal stole,
There flooded was the light of one it loved
From all eternity!—Our beings moved
Together, and her eyes of constant blue,
Throe bluer, as our souls commingle too;
And like the harmonies of quiet woods,
They rested there at last in melting moods
Of one great symphony of love, *sans* end,
Whose tender note-trills would forever blend.

Forever, ay, for as I clasp her, clad
In all the matchless beauty of the glad

Melodic heavens, I seem to hold the stars
To my transported breast,—while Night unbars
New worlds of golden song,—and Life beteems
Completest consummation of love's dreams!
Dreamer of dreams! Thy cup Lethean dull,
Crescented is to its beatic full!
Thou soughtest Beauty, earth's celestial song,
O'er which the Rhapsodist for aeons long
Hath twanged his Lesbian lyre deliriously!
The Sage writ rivulets of ink—like thee!
The Sophist's *summum bonum* and dear phrensy!
Beauty! ambrosial as Aurora's breath,
When blithely o'er the morning hills she fareth!
Beauty! elusive, which Briarean charms
Might not encompass,—now in thy poor arms
She liest trembling, palpitating,—see,
As Cupid over the immortality
Of Psyche! O the bliss unparagoned
To mortal! this, proud Nature's darling, zoned;
Her peerless image! favorite daughterling!
The prize-work of the omnific Sculptor-King!
For whom was forged the central vital light,
And starry lamps swung in the vast of night,
That Time might gape at her in wondrous awe!

Alas, will not my poor heart crack its flaw?
His joyous inundation over-verse?
O thou supernal peace o' the universe,
Over my being spread thy deathless wing!
Shield me as doth the firmament enring
The earth; while my transported spirit, like
The spark, once famished, flickering, gleeful strike
The illimitable oceans of the ærial deep,
And by æolian magic fed, upleap,
And kiss the stars!

O let immortal love
Be mine, that on this beauteous vision, whereof
I am vouchsafèd, feed! Rhodanthe! pure dove,
Sweet maid! from thine was lit the Peri's smile,
Illumining heaven's gate! in Cyprian isle,
Herald of rosy-bosomed morn! O lulled
In fairy dreams that scorn life's leaden, dulled,
Black-stolèd cares, on dais smothered deep
With vermeil dewy roses, fresh from sleep
In perfumed dells,—let us attune ourselves
To love's sweet interlude; while spirit-elves,
With spangled cloth of silvery moonbeam-mist,
Curtain our halcyon spring-tide bower; and, hist!
Ye myriad vassals, vail your flowery heads,

In homage of your queen,—then, to your beds,
Flower-tucked, and hide your golden Argus-eyes;—
We 'll give ourselves to lovers' ecstasies;
We 'll tell twice o'er, a kiss on every page,
The story of our hearts' dear pilgrimage;
Now laughing at the dark uncertain waves,
That buffeted our bark of other days;
Now drifting far from ocean's boisterous caves;
Now riding anchor in her smiling ways.

In accents sweet and low,—at my dear suit,—
As tinkling music of a minstrel's lute,
Heard on the evening waters rise, Rhodanthe
Relates, as guerdon of my pleadings warmth,
The tenderest tale that ever touched a soul;
I was as though, in magical control,
A seraph's harp, whose thousand golden strings
Were labyrinths of melody—deep springs
Harmonious,—o'er which there trembling played
Celestial hands invisible—so swayed
My passion's depths, so stirred its dulcet wings,
At her recital of the simplest things.
With starry eyes that shone through dewy mist,
As when the rain is by the moonlight kissed,

She wistfully unfolded her young life
To me, even from its earliest baby-strife
In Syria, rich in roses, her dear nurse
And cradle; how even in its bud a curse
Had burgeoned; and, she sighingly discloses,
How, though the crownèd Queen of all the Roses,
She had been exiled by the envious crew
Of some pale-cheeked pretender. With sad adieu,
She then had to the Isle of Flowers come,
To sway in sweet dominion this new home
Of faithful subjects who had followed her;
And here with other sovrans holding sceptre,
She ruled o'er several realms of all the Flowers,
Each in its vantage coign of bee-sweet bowers;
Each in its balmy clime and favorite haunt;
Some by the water-side; some 'neath the gaunt
Uptowering mountains; some on sunny slopes;
All even as in man's estates, their hopes,
Their aspirations, and their loves and lives,
Happy or melancholy, as contrives
To color all their days, that atmosphere,
Wherein their souls breathe and are breathed; and here,
While each to Flora, Goddess Palatine,
Paid homage due to sovereignty divine,

As Suzerain of the adoring Roses, she,
Rhodanthe, most joyed to shower on each, heart-free,
A wealth of love alike—that preened their beauty
Within her kingdom's pale. But, oh!—and here
She sighed with such sweet breath, that in their sheer
Idolatry of her, methoughten all
The roses had exhaled their souls,—withal,
She vowed, 't was difficult to please each one;
Flowers were frail as other creatures, prone
To petulance, to reinless pride; amain
To jealousies that scathe; and then, again,
Although their ancestry from Venus traced
Its blossoming family-tree, 't was oft disgraced;
And strange internal schisms raged, as when
Some pedant faction dared the common ken
With this false tenet gloze—that in all lands
'T was held red roses sprang from fire-brands,
Burning about a Jewish fair *pucelle*,
Who, martyred foully, the sacring-bell
Had tolled this miracle: the stake unburned
Blossomed in roses crystal-white, and turned
To crimson roses the dying crimson flames.
'T was pretty—which most justified its claims.
Then once, she said, all loth to mention names,

A most unhappy war had waged between
The adherents of the Red Rose and their Queen,
On one side; on the other the White had been:—
And eke to internecine strife, alas,
Rose social wrongs that did the state harass;
As petty bickerings of a privileged class,
Claiming descent from Nature's highest emprise,
The thornless rose which bloomed in Paradise:—
Then, individual foibles, vanities;
Dissensions loosening family-ties,—the list
Was long: and fools and profligates she wist,
Who wantoned, wasteful of their inward worth,
With every languorous South or blatant North,
Which blew their way, the favors, naught but death
Should ever claim, their sweetest odor's breath;
As fickle maids will pelt their kisses light
As froth at every cavalier in sight;
While others, misers, in idolatry
Locked fast their perfumed love, their light, and beauty:—
Then those, who, pranked in costliest filigree,
Lorded themselves o'er all of low degree,
Yet bore beneath the hollow cheek's false paint,
The taunting secret of the canker's taint,—
Even as in the nether world of man:—

And those, who humbly in their humble clan,
Lived by the way-side, loving there to be,
The jewel of their chaste simplicity
Close-guarded from the gairish day's caress,
Lest it should lose one ray of loveliness;
Ah, sooth, these made the world with pride to glow,
More than the tinsel pomp and glistening show
Of multitudes, who on their palace spent
A world of empty spoil and ornament;
"Which strange phenomenon," quoth archly-sweet
Rhodanthe, "displays a type, whose pattering feet
Wear smooth the stones of many a city street.
In troth, similitudes like these, one can
Trace in the world of Flowers and world of Man,
Ad infinitum." Here she heaved a sigh;
Then stooping kissed a sister-rose close-by,
Divinely whispering me: "What miracle!
That out of common clay, this flower, ethereal
As cloud-wreaths melting in the skies, can mould
A glorious crown of crimson and of gold;
Its exhalations spicing the world for thee
With aromatic airs of Araby;
Till hoary Tellus swells his doting heart,
Each time he contemplates his magian art!"

“Good sooth,” I cry, inspired by her eyes,
“’Tis even thus our spherey mortals rise!
I mind me one, who, clad in ’s peasant gear,
Scion of humble folk, with lusty cheer,
Tended his father’s goats ’mong craggy peaks;
Yet idling not away the days and weeks,
Time’s golden sands, till death had barbed her dart,
He listened deep entrancèd, to the heart
Of Nature beating, while the shadows slept
Athwart the grassy slopes, or, waking, crept
Along, with lengthening of their phantom limbs;
And thus he watched them, till the day-star dims,
Steal softly in the caverns of the night.
Oft-times, he noted with a strange delight,
The lovely Naiads, wreathed with lily-crown,
Lure in their mirrored palace fathoms down
A crystal-pool, the beauteous cloud-gods, fair
As Adon, who, in sweetest dalliance there,
In those enchanting grots, would linger long,
Till Phoebus, blazing-eyed, the amorous throng
Compellèd back to the heavens to upswarm,
Transforming them in monsters of the storm:
And when the wrath of high Olympus hurled
The blinding thunderbolts about his curled

And boyish head; and, at each breath he took,
The forkèd lightnings' fitful cracklings shook
The pillared base of all creation;
And winds afire rushed with swift elation;
And in their lairs crouched savage beasts of prey
Afeard,—he loved the tempest's splendid play,
And tamed the maddened winds with tender hand;
Until the moon, beneficent and bland,
Unrolling radiance from the vaporous rack,
Lulled all the fiery elementals back
To peace again from their dynamic wars;
Then, sleeping 'neath the canopy of stars,
Upon the bosom of his Mother Earth,
The youth dreamed o'er these beauties and their birth;
And in the day he sang them in his songs,
Till all the people, chafing o'er their wrongs
And sufferings, flocked to his hills to hear him tell
Of Earth's delight, divinity, and spell,
In wondrous chords of colors and of sounds;
The things they saw, but which the mortal bounds—
But which his spirit-eyes led them to see,
And which his voice made them to sing as he,
Whose spirit loved the spirits of the hills,
The whispering trees, the vales, and murmuring rills:

And thus the peasant formed of common mould,
Became a prophet with a heart of gold,
And soul revered, a seer 'cross life's span,
And man's divine interpreter of man."

Thus ardent o'er my theme I spoke; I stole
No glance aside, my gaze upon the goal,
Like strained-neck courser fixed;—my tale was told;
And I'd not noticed pearly tears had rolled
Their star-lit worlds of love and pity o'er
Rhodanthe's long trembling lashes; precious store!
That smiled like sunlight streaming through the mist
Of morn. Ah, would I had been bold!—had kissed
Away those rueful cloudlets, as the sun
Dispersed them; but a holy fear, anon,
Possessed me 'fore this flower beyond my reach:
So, while my love spurs on, she prays more speech,
And lured on by the lovelight brimming over
Blue-tender eyes, I am like any lover
Constrained to tell my heart's storm-stressèd story,
With all its aches for all its little glory;
A mortal's unillumined wanderings,
'Mid lashing tempests, and the taunts and stings,
Through which a troubled and apprentice-soul

Must pass, ere it can reach the elusive goal,
The ever-widening beacons mountain-heights
Of mastercraftsmanship; those cresset-lights,
Firing the watch-hills of the starless nights,
And fed fast by the torch of the Beloved;
Such dreads and doubts and miserable woe, as moved
The brave Ulysses 'mid the shrieking fiends
Of hell's black hole; or him, whose memory weans
Me toward the world beyond the mystic bourne—
The blind old minstrel, weak, and phantom-worn,
Who, begging, seven ungrateful cities trod,
Oblivious to the covert nudge and nod,—
The while his tortured ears hear from their tomb,
The tragic thunderings of the Trojan doom:
How 't was my lot to wander and to weep;
With lost Electra in the ærial deep;
With such as goaded Io to be driven;
With such as Hercules long to have striven;
A thousand hounding Furies at my heels;
And all for that my restless spirit feels
Unsatisfied, and seeks the goal unknown,
Unfathomed, undefined, but somewhere, lone,
And looming still in awe and loveliness;
That Lethe-stream of lucent happiness,

Where I might steep my soul and free its weight
Of clinging mire, malice, and of hate!
And suffering long, as Aeson's son, I strove,
Sans let, to gain my golden treasure-trove.

“And first I hied me—at their merry call,—
To the joyous Court of the Pleasure Gods:—
I heard their ribald lauds;
I heard the rabble in the Wassail-Hall;
I asked if Happiness was there—and all
Cried out: ‘Yea, yea! she queens our festival!’—

But, O! I saw the death-wine as it purls!
Beneath men's feet the buds of virtue torn!
And trampled on love's flaxen baby-curles!
And hearts of mothers seared with molten rods!

I wept; I called on Happiness! The scorn
Alone I list of the jeering Pleasure Gods!—
She was not there!— I prayed Jove give them mercy,
To escape the enchantments doomed of Circe,—
And fled!—

“I faltered on, and came
Where smiled a Woman 'tired in scarlet shame;

The leering paint scarce masked grim Vice's waste;
My lips of ashes taste:
Corruption sows the Night with piteous prey!
A Star of Heaven on the dunghill lay!
This Star might have been loved of men alway,
Had hearts glowed bright with ideal purity!
Now in the dust she glistered mockingly;
A tear some gave her—but she jeered and fled;
Some took the dust and cast it on their head—
I knelt me down adread;
My heart dejected, and my fearful soul half-dead.—
But why these woful tragedies
Rehearse, Rhodanthe, dear maid?
These horrent murders of the sweetest ties,
That garland souls unto the eternal skies?
What steps from thy celestial gaze for long had strayed?—
I bade farewell the charred, choked path of life,
Where I had found but sin and desolation rife.

“Now shifts the scene:—Hail, Croesus and thy curse!—
Behold me, in the abysm deep immerse
Myself, where all the crying souls of men,
From Chaos to the present ken,

Have sought the golden Ganges bath of bliss.
O list, Rhodanthe; love, I will tell thee this!
Then, Priestess sweet, thou shalt forthwith to me
 A Flower-sermon preach,
Fragrant with thy divinity,
 To chasten me, and teach
 A higher soaring;
Till airs aeolian melodize, and play,
 Divinely pouring
Thorough the labyrinths of my soul!—Love, pray,
 Follow me sadly to the Market-place:—
 See with what unctuous grace,
Men drachmas trade for souls, and lose;
 Lapping Life's golden ooze;
Grubbing old Mother Earth with bleeding nails;
Snatching the jewelled ears from 'neath her veils;
 Uplifting itching palms
 To Plutus god; their qualms
And heart-aches vast, Tartarean, beg him hold
Abeyant, with his amulets of gold!
 Like royal Midas blest
 By Bacchus, is their dear request
Rewarded; and then, magically turned
To yellow, glistening gold is all they yearned,

Or touched; all, all is golden-sweet;
Ay, all the very bread they eat
Grows hard, metallic, tasteless—merely gold!
And all they drink is burning molten gold!
And all they love seems hard and glittering cold!
They would exchange the sow's ear for the purse!—
Distraught, love, I implore, that from the curse
Of gold, the gods may surcease bring;
And like the niggard Phrygian king,
I bathe me in the Pactolonian stream;
Then hie me to the fields of Pan to dream,
In Nature's arms, and hide my Midas ears!
For I had learned that from the weirs
Of this wise world of old,
That none with nets of gold,
Or corded golden jess,
Can snare the wingèd-wraith of endless Happiness!

“Again the curtain's rise, sweet Flower-queen:
Behold the Scholar-Mystic seeking now
Deep-rooted Past to plough
For Present-fruit,—to glean
But furrows on his brow!
On, on the ploughshare cuts! O wildly keen,

Life's secret from the runic lore of Time,
And spirit-parleys from the battlement
Of Heaven, at last to wrest!
I, in my earth-reared tent,
All battened down with slime;
With visage pale and spent,
As ancient palimpsest,
Deep delve and dig 'mid pandects wormed and smutched;
My cell four dank bare walls; my food untouched;
I tent to find the balm my heart is yearning:
Locked is the rebus, life is slowly burning!

“O ivy! the reward of learnèd brows,
For thee I pray, and fast;
O bring me peace at last!
Deep, deeper thy poor mortal ploughs;
Till like Melampus, versed in hidden lore
Of birds and creeping things, by virtue sheer
Of young spared serpents, who, in time of yore,
Had liefly touched to his dull dreamless ear
Their forkèd tongues,—I dream
Adrift on Lethe-stream;—
To fit Life's chain with all her missing links;
To unravel all the riddles of the Sphinx;

To lure the fairies in the forest wind;
Refine the crude philosophies of Ind;
New-search the genesis of gods and men;
Explore the Milky-Way with diamonds paven;
 In measures tune Polymnia's lyre;
 Relume Promethean fire;
Climb up the craggy mountains of the Moon,
To learn how much she loved Endymion;
Converse with Ixion and his loving Cloud;
O'erscan the Sun's nigrescent shroud;
Ay, count the jewels in Orion's belt;
Depict where meet, where melt
The Rainbow's countless nice-consorting hues;
Then, far on crimson cloud-boats sail, to fuse
At last into the heavenward ether, where,
Mingling in the Olympian thoroughfare,
I'll fetch from far across the Stygian shore,
All secrets mortals yearn! Smile not; far more,
Ay, infinitely more than thou canst guess,
Fair one, with calm assurance of success,
I planned, that I might plant on dizzy peaks,
Piled Pelion-high, o'erreaching Romans, Greeks,
And Babylonian scholars, the banner bright
Of my immortal fame!—Alas, poor wight!

My blind black mole soon burrowed into sight
Of gairish day—but never found the light!

“Now giddy with the heat of day,
At last despairing by the way,
Full wearily I sank upon the sands,
Upon the bank of River Time.
Poor pilgrim, from the Heights Sublime!
I watch the woful spectacle, the bands
Huddled of marching men,
The vision Mirza's ken
Could never fathom; and mine fails like his.
'Life is a dream! O let me wake where bliss
Unlocked by Death abides, in the happy vale,
In the land of the Hyperboreans!' This my wail;
And lo, the messenger of the gods,
With bell, and book, and pregnant nods,
Conducts my soul 'mid strains of flutes and viols,
Unto Mount Helicon, where after trials
Probationary, wise Urania,
Bade me from her high nebulae,
Bedazzling, an I still would steep my soul
Into the seas of Happiness—and scroll

My name forever on Fame's brazen portals,
 I must with those immortals
Conjoin, with those bright essences, the throng,
Which wings with fledgling pinions flights of song
 Empyrean. 'In worlds of dreams,'
 Quoth she, 'fed by the phosphor moonbeams,
Offshuffle thou the shackles of thy clay,
And songs of joy wreath in thy dirgeful day;
Quaff thou this cup of murmurous Hippocrene.'
Deep was the blushful draught the poesy-queen
Regaled me; from the star-ypaven floor
Straight off on pennoned Pegasus I soar,
Unto the crystalline of heaven's gate,
 To meet my new-invited fate;
Teasing the circumambient aether-seas,
 With songs that shame the crystal-throated lark.
Alas, poor harpist, on the evening breeze
 Dyeth thy swan-song's antiphon, and hark!
Adown the Aleain plain thou fall'st to death
Of all thy iris-hopes;—but still thy breath
 Fails not that made thee fair!—
 I tempt again the upper air,
Chasing the singing Pleiads through the skies,
To catch some secret of their melodies;

But bright Aurora pierced them one by one,
And I fell heavily 'mong the falling meteors prone.

“Once more Amphion lending aid,
My phrensied songs to man and maid,
Reverberated 'mong the attentive hills:
And, lo! methought the rooks, and rocks, and rills,
Like steeds swift-startled by strange sounds,
Dash in alarums to the grounds,
Where I am throned, to hear.
What ecstasy to win the general ear!
Full audibly my wonder-work hath wooed
The eternal plaudits of the multitude;
My winged ambition overvaults
The vasty regioned universe; nor halts,
Until it clangeth at the fretted gates of heaven!
It is my rightful meed;
My future loometh big;
Up Pegasus, good steed,
Nor for the star-dust care a fig!
I see my gorgeous monument, which even
Now adorns, flanked by the admiring throng,
The Pantheon of the golden age of song.—

Thus do I dream!—and in the cold gray dawn,
I knew 't was Somnus and his hybrid spawn;
The Night deceived, and Hope, when morn had fired
The East, and Earth rang glad with song, expired.”

“But,” fair Rhodanthe to me, her azure orbs,—
Whose changing wonders all my soul absorbs,—
Opening like blessed islands of the blue,
Through Cirri suddenly seen, “is it not true,
The lyric poet, and bird of silvery night
In boscage niched, exhale from sheer delight
Their panting souls? unburthening the flood
Divine, oppressive, to the heart of the wood,
Nor reck for aught save for the song itself?
Which, startling atomies of sound, from pelf
Into bright being, they soar and blithely dance
About the jocund spinning globe; to glance
Off lustily to the farthest bounds of space,
Engladdening every creature, every race,
That listeneth in the Void immeasurable.
Is that not joy enow? not crown of laurel?
Not plaudits? Then, sing on! nor thyself wrong,
To stop and list for echo of the throng.”

“Rhodanthe, beloved, divine despair is Death;
But Love is Life, and Beauty is its breath!

’Tis why I sought;

Desire’s vultures fought

Me fell, insatiable, and ’gainst the bars

Of heavenly gold, all bruised, to clench the stars,

I fling myself, but swoon; I try afresh;

I cannot still the tumult of the flesh:

‘O, that I might put off mortality,

Who live lulled in the joys of life!’ I cry:

But like the unfledged, sightless eyas hawk,

Waiting for ’s mother, whom the cunning stalk

Of gleeful hunters long has lured and slain,

In my lorn lofty home of hope in vain

I hunger, unconsoled, and nurse life’s wound.

Love, there ’s no mortal to be found,

Who chafes not ’neath his dearth,

His weak achievement’s worth!

Whoso seeks Truth but ends not ever thus:

Nearing its sun, to feel like Icarus,

His waxed wings melting and his soaring done?

Still we do Nature cope that Art be won;

Still boldly tempt, frail Artisan,

The marvels of the inimitable gods

To mock; and pigmies, with pale golden rods,
Do battle 'gainst the giant Infinity
Of Nature, instinct with Divinity!
We ape the bee to build a Parthenon;
We boast of looms Arachne's web would scorn;
We strain our souls to match the linnet's lay:
Ye dainty daisies' airy shadow-play!
What Art e'er stole your subtile grace away?
Who vie thee, Nature, when thou paint'st the rose?
What Polycletan catch thy daedal pose?
Or Alchemist dare dream to mimic fire
Of upturned ruby on thine earthly pyre?
O bitterest gall, that we ourselves
Must wait, while Art, with eyes,
Ledged like falcon, vainly delves
Thy devious ways and sorceries!
'O Paradise of Fools!' exclaims the Sage,
In chasmèd, endless, melancholiness;
'Life thou hast passed me by; and Art, thine image
Ever renews its virgin loveliness;
Its tantalizing sempiternal lure,
That shall forever and a day endure!
This was the rift, love, in the lute;
This was the rind of labor's fruit,

Whose acrid disappointment killed the savor
Of inward sweetness, and all life's endeavor.

I thought myself as withered grass,
Meet fodder for the oven. Alas,
My shining expectation of glad youth,
A star deep-buried in the dust; and, sooth,
Forlorn, neglected, by the way-side thrown,
I watched Life's high-road wind away alone.

"Cimmerian Night now hearsed me utterly;
She seemed to take me in her sable arms,
Nursing my woe; beneath whose weighted pillory
Insuperable, I sank in aguish 'larums,
Calling on Death, of Night's dark brood, to ease
My stricken soul's world-sorrow:
'O save me from the morrow
Despiteous!' I plead: instead, lulled charms,
As of a Lotus-laden air doth tease
My senses till I weep;
Death's gentle brother Sleep
Appears, who, dropping juice of poppy-buds
Upon mine eyes, now languor-blest,
By Western Seas wafts me on 's breast,
Far to the Land of Dreams and Fairy woods.

“And while I slept
There gently crept,
A tender voice upon mine ear;
It sweetly fell,
As vesper bell,
Or manna from the skies, or tear
Love sheds upon an infant’s bier:
It said: ‘An thou
Wilt find thy vow
Enguerdoned, Happiness, thy goal,
Thy golden gate,
Lure of thy soul,
At last—then, straight,
Hesperia, the lode-star follow,
Who’ll lead thee to the embosomed hollow,
Flower-broidered, where
A garden fair
The engladdened vision treasureth;
Where thou shalt see
Unearthly Beauty,
Envisaged in a maid fame clepeth
Rhodanthe, who all earth’s fair exceedeth:
She like a flower,
In rosy-bower

Of Flora's garden unveiled shall be;
Take thou the river,
Which like a mirror,
Goes glinting toward the emerald sea.'

"She ceased; meseemed
I saw, or dreamed,
Rhodanthe, that I, in sooth, beheld thee;
Quick-startled woke I to felicity;
Ecstatic beat my heart's wild melody:
'T was Spring! Earth frolicked in her blosmy frock,
Of crimson raiments, mystic hue of love,
With ospreys rare, clasped with a golden lock;
Apollo's shield blazed high in the heavens above;
The lark sang blithely in her skyward flight,
A message thrilled with hope reborn;
And all the greens with goldilocks were pight;
And milk-white blossoms waved me from the thorn:
'Up and away!
For thee, Rhodanthe, doth stay.'
I heard the honey-bees and insects chant,
Mellifluously from lush-sweet amber fields;
While love-illumined crystal rills aslant
The daisied meadows peeped like silver eels;

And in their gladness free from monotones,
The fountains warbled o'er the enamelled stones.

“It was a day idyllic as in groves
Idalian, when blithe birds and woodland doves,
In murmuring sanctities made earth thrice-blest.
Love breathed mysterious longings in my breast,
And whispered rapturous dream-trysts to my heart;—
So girding up my loins, all lief I start
To journey toward the East, Rhodanthe, to thee.
And now, thou kenn'st in troth, where, fixedly,
Thy poor Chaldean 's set his meteor bright,
And peerless constellation of his night,
Fretted with countless stars! In thee, ensphered,
Shines Happiness, at last! Sweet Rose, revered;
Thou gift of all the gods; thou visioned Beauty,
Incomparable! In contemplating thee,
My ravished soul, forever, dreamily,
Shall float on amethystine seas of bliss,
Unending and immeasurable: and this,
My heaven! ever by thy side to be,
Rhodanthe; as ripples kiss the water-lily;
As Ocean's bosom nests Ionian isles;
Dear love, I 'll bask me in thy noon-day smiles;

I'll read thy rare and ever-changing beauties;
I'll stroll with thee by day 'mid symphonies,
Museful of flowers, and, through thine azure eyes,
I'll watch the starry hosts of heaven arise
At even; and when thou veil'st them, sleepily,
I'll kiss the veined lids,—ah, this will be
The aeon-sought haven of my soul's content;
And mine the peace that hath the waters lent
The unruffled skies, and which, like dreams that fire
The Lotus-eaters, passeth all desire!"

As in this boundless transport I, thus madly,
Quick-ended my discourse, Rhodanthe smiled sadly;
A smile, so like the faint-smile of the sun,
When through the crudded-rack it peers, anon,
Ere it is swallowed in the night; ay, wan,
As that which flickers o'er the mother's lips,
When later year-dreams conjure up, like ships,
Black-masted, riding into port, trist memories
Of the babe, of crowing, crooning sovereignties,
Which crossed the darkling river all too soon;
So like the shadow of a heart in tune
With melancholy, that I, fearfully,
Drew back. "Rhodanthe!" I saw how, suddenly,

The radiant flush of joy had run affrighted
From her rose-pallid cheek; and, ghostly lighted,
The effulgent beauty of her countenance,
Shone 'neath the moon's bright shifting shadow-dance,
Like smoothest silvery mother-o-pearl; and, lo,
Her lovely head drooped heavily, as though
Its haloed crown of spun-gold tresses weighed
It down; or, as a glorious rose, arrayed
With thousand petals, bends in freighted sweetness.
I felt afeard, and spoke with troubled fleetness;
She answered not: there rose an ominous stillness
On the air; the moonlight 'gan to quiver fast,
Convulsively, as though 't would not long last;
The flowers trembling, seemed to be afeard;
The Tawny Lily and the yellow Goatsbeard,
Both of fair Flora's Horologe, marked past
The midnight hour; the Roses stood aghast:
"Rhodanthe!" I cried, awe-struck; even as her frail
Young form swayed like a poplar in a gale,
And lightly fell unconscious in my arms.
O now, I fold the heavenliest of charms,
The epitome of beauty to my breast!
The silken tendrils of her hair untressed,—
Sweeter than summer sighing o'er the meads,—

Fan my hot cheek; I tremble like the reeds;
I quiver like a vessel in a storm.
"Rhodanthe! Belovèd, look at me!" Her warm
And palpitating beauty faintly sighs;
I strive in vain to gaze into her eyes,
But cannot find their azure deeps; two pearls,
Orbèd with pity roll from 'neath the curls
Dark violet of her long lashes. "Love!
Rhodanthe!" Alas, vain pleadings: "Thou sweet dove!"
I feel her in my hands resistless lie:
Ye gods! O what! Can then such Beauty die?
No, no! 't is mine! for it I've immolated
A life,—a spirit worn,—and I have waited
Interminable nights and days,—and thou,
O gorgon Death dar'st not to cheat me now!
"Rhodanthe! The pink rose in perpetual Spring,
Like this, knows nought of spirits withering;
Nought beautiful can die, or death eclipse;
Still, still do echo the Memnonian lips,
When, crimsoning with love, the sunset-heart
Sends kisses to them! Then, love, none can part
Thee and thy beauty, and thy beauteous self
From me; I worshipped thee 'fore all the pelf
Intreasured of the world! O let the star-shine

Of those loved orbs relume this heart of mine!
O dost still breathe? Let then the ambrosial wine
Cordial my heart! Tempestuous love divine!
The world's supremest happiness now is mine
At last! The consummation I have dreamed
Is mine at last, and 't is to me beteed,
To cull the rip'st perfection of life's love!"
Closer the flower-form I crushed, and strove
To quell my leaping heart of calm bereaven;
The enchanting face upturned glows like the heaven
Of heavens; the dewy lips, the hue of pale
Pomegranate, pouted, fearfully assail
My soul-enflamed desire, on them to press
A heavenly kiss. I quail—for such caress
Might desecrate such awful loveliness!
Yet what is Beauty, if 't is not enjoyed?
Those rubious lips would tempt a god! "Avoid!"
The panting zephyrs in the air—the bees—
The flowers—ay, all Nature's voice in trees
And fountains seeming warn me verily
Of some impending strange catastrophe—
But I will kiss those lips which I adore!—
Impassionedly I drained their virgin store
Of honied sweets—

And then I knew no more!

Straightway a film of Stygian night upsealed
Mine eyes; the earth upon her axis reeled;
Portentous thunder shudderingly rocked
The amazèd sphere, and all the spirits locked
In fire and water, seemed to have possessed
My heart, and roused dread bodings in my breast:
Benumbed I grew; and through my veins a flood
Of icy liquor flows instead of blood;
I feel a derelict in slime and mud:
“Rhodanthe!” I strive to call, but o’er the word
My lips form,—O, but not a sound is heard:
My tongue—that once had weaved that word in song—
Claps inarticulate its roof.

BOOK III

How long

I thus remained insensible I lost
All count; benighted consciousness long tossed
Uneasily; but soon confused sounds,
Dull, indistinguishable as the rounds
Of ghostly visits in a haunted grange,
Disturbed my lethargy: and then the strange
Faint swish of waters on a shingly shore,
Came gurgling to mine ears; then rumbling roar
Of chasmèd torrents; then, the long, forlorn,
Weird chant of chaste Minerva's bird of morn,
Shattered my cryptic shard;—still but a rift:—
My heart beats fast with clammy fears; I lift
My lids and frightened look about; cold streaks
Of gray disclose the dawn like turgid peaks,
Jutting in waters of a polar sea.
Where am I? Where Rhodanthe? What irony
Of fate? The faery-garden gone! ay, gone

The roses and my lady's flowery throne;
The silvery veil of Phoebus hallowing all—
All gone! Alas! instead I stand in thrall
Of thick and gloomy curtained woods, astir
With strange, uncanny life, weird with the whirr
Of ominous sounds; with shrilly birds of night,
Flying the spectral day; and, gaunt in might,
Cavernous beasts; uncouth reptilia,
Coiling, uncoiling, 'mid the leprous fauna,
As though to slough their horned and spotted skin.
Here might the foul Medusa murdered been!
O lurid spot! for murders fit and sin
Shunning the light—for deeds demonic, fell,
O desolation indescribable!
And where last even in coral-blushes stood
Rhodanthe's rose-bower, now 's a gnarlèd wood,
Of blackened, leafless boughs weaved all in woe,
Their forkèd claws cleaved cruelly in their foe,
Like vengeful Furies locked in Death's embrace;
Our dais now a slime-green rock, whose face
Crawls thick with pholases and lichens slippery;
Beside me yawns a dizzy chasm's mystery,
Where torrents leap as if to Tartarus!
In horror I recoil, well-nigh delirious,—

When, as I ope my hand, stove in the mud,
Lo! like a glittering shower of golden blood,
A mass of crushed rose-petals fluttering fall
Into the ooze. Is this the end of all
My roseate dreams, Rhodanthe?—a memory?—
I pick the soft pink shells—the flowery
Memento mori—they are scentless, dead!
Ay, 't is the all-ending all—the shimmerèd
Dream-fabric wherein Beauty dwelt—all fled!
'T was too unearthly beautiful to last—
'T was all too much in love with the ethereal past:—
Thus ends the pageantry of Happiness
In Beauty's death,—a kiss—and hopelessness!

Now, with the loss of all—what joy to live?
Were it not best, unloved, what 's left to give—
The little breath that fans this mortal flame,—
And from some rock Leucadian leap, to claim
Rhodanthe, perchance, in realms, where leaden day
Veils gardens dread and Proserpine holds sway?
Where Love is dead, and flowers fade in sorrow?
Where in the collied night is snuffed the morrow?
No! Better far in the present urn the past:
Sweet Memory shall these petals, while they last,

Kiss into likeness of her haunting shape
Of loveliness!—Ah, Beauty cannot 'scape
The heaven of the mind, not even be
The heart forlorn as hell's vastidity!
No! I'll forever wait, Rhodanthe, for thee!—
O how the North moans Nature's obsequies,
Thorough the naked branches of the trees!
Sad troops of spirits flying from the wrath
Of thunder-glooming Jove:—along their path
Flies too Rhodanthe? Cries, too? Beloved! bright-hued,
Seest me, despairing in the desolate wood,
Alone?

The eager air bites to the bone;
I shall incorp the ooze—I must begone!
But whither? Toward the East? Ah, love, 't was there
I found thee—Ay, 't is augural! Despair,
Avaunt! I'll travel on—till life's dark close!—
Sadly the remnants of my lovely rose
I gather up, and, heart-sore, start to seek
The open of the wood. My tendons creak
'Neath trepidant limbs; low angry mutterings
Of subterranean tremors twist my heart-strings;
The ground I tread doth shudderingly quake;

The murky air glints like a brimstone lake;
Whilst buried alive high in the vault above me,
The fitful lightning, crackling in great glee,
Blazes the ebon wood, and seemingly,
Points fiery fingers deep into the doom
Of the glade, impenetrably thick with gloom,
Where I must go. Misshapen monsters, fierce,
Lynx-eyed, bar up my forward way, and pierce
The air and belch on me their venomous fumes;
Whilst dark malodorous wings of bats like brooms
Innumerable flying past me brush my face,
Until my heart nigh paralyzed, my pace
I quicken—then, for fear, begin to run;
Torrential rains forthwith break loose upon
Me from the opened sluice-gates of the skies;
And whipped by maddened winds, like scorpion-flies,
They lash my face.

Onward I speed. An oak,
Whose hoary head and massive trunk bespoke
Its Titan age, reared high in proud revolt
Deep in the lowering welkin, by a bolt
Of sulphurous fire is rived right to the root,
Crashing its measured length even at my foot,

With roar like demon's laughter; its huge bulk
Blockades my forthright way:—my soul in sulk,
I am half-daunted,—but enforced to 'scape,
I wend around his despicable shape,
Only to sink waist-deep in treacherous bogs.
To escape a living burial I clutch at logs
Evasive, and o'erhanging spokèd boughs,
Which spare me while they lacerate my brows,
And scotch my hands. Amidst the deafening din
And carnage of the storm, I hear the thin,
Ear-piercing screech of gnome-owl, and the qualm
Ill-boding of the raven, that Hell's psalm,
Which freezes all my blood till I scarce breathe
For fright. While ever and anon I seethe
With gushing joy,—false dawns of hope:—meseems,
I hear weird voices from the trees and streams
And current air, hallooing me, yet none
I see. They call, they pray, they curse, they crone,
They mimic, chant in an unearthly tone;
Sometimes right at mine ear, then 'fore me on,
As if they jeered me to confusion:
Sometimes they mind me of sweet childhood's hour,
Or frolics in the heyday of youth's power;
Or darker days, begun and ended by

One long, low, sad and unconsolable cry;
Sometimes, methinks, voices of lovers cross,
So lilting sweet to me their ariose
Resemblance seems; as though, alas, in death
As life, no stay their trysting tempereth,
But their dread punishment is ever thus—
To meet and then to part.

At last, with ponderous
Slow dragging of my leaden feet, through brake
And brere, and rank dense undergrowths; through lake
And mere, through bruising cacti, milwort fields
And furze, I stumble, while my breath nigh yields,
To jagged, clodded, frozen ground, which leads
Unto a bald and lonely crag; sparse weeds
Alone had striven to hide its naked shame.
Here intermittent sheets of blinding flame,
Disclose to my abhorrent gaze, the rage
Of goaded nature in her wild'st death-wage
Against herself, to reap the aftermath,—
As once outfumed the vials of her wrath,
What time ruled Chaos ere the stars were born,
And ere her elemental passions' scorn
Was humbled by a Spirit Voice, whose grace,

Full sweet, yet shook the walls of farthest space!
I shut my eyes, and turn away my face—
When, 'bove the enraged whirlwind's spleen; the shocks
Of shattered earth; the dismal cries of flocks
Of frightened birds; the roars of savage beasts,
Roused from their flooded lairs, and carnal feasts,—
There rises to my ear the measured boom
Of Ocean maddened by the tempest's doom.
I can descry her in the eastern light;
Her vast, black, undulating herd, in sight
Heaves up, like dragons huge with foaming mouths,
The shore,—then, raging impotently, drowse,
And roll back fuming slowly, fretfully,
Into the seething cauldron of the sea.
A gulf impassable! Must I give place?
Lay down to die? Or my weak steps retrace
Athwart that witches' hell of hail and flame?

Scarce orb'd to full these thoughts, when I became
Unconsciously aware, toward my right,
Deep-down the rock-ribbed shore, a star-fixed light
Burned steadily; into my vision dart
Its arrowy rays, enkindling in my heart
Delirious hope. A habitation in

This wilderness? Some human wretch of sin,
Even like myself, marooned to northermost,
Upon this lurid and tempestuous coast,
Lone tilting-ground of Titans, Cyclopes,
And bloody brood-belched aborigines
Of wounded Uranus? With feverish gait,
The jagged hillock slope,—blind to my fate—
Blacker than Tartar's night, I stumble down;
Mine eyes stuck fast unto that beacon-crown,
That glistening guide, that terrene star, that lure,
Which racks of flying rain and cloud obscure.
As closer to it I approach, more wan
It flickers, dyingly, for spectral dawn,
Gaining upon the daemons of the night,
Now haggard ushers in the sullen light
Of day, illumining the torn askew,
And bleeding face of earth with livid hue.
Nearer, I note, dim where the cloud-rack gapes,
Shadows fantastic taking on strange shapes,
Of what at last looms through the blur, a rude,
Patched hovel blown by the elemental feud
And hazard of the storm, with saving grace,
In semblance of a human dwelling-place.
Pilfered it was from shattered temple, fane,

Whose pillared greatness humbled strewed the plain
Of sea-blown sand, and seemed the epitome
Of cities dead, dogged by the unsated sea
For centuries. Vilely had the mongrel thatch
Its vagrant self upheaved, as 't were a match
Against the huge volcanic rock beside it;
The hail, the rain, the whistling winds deride it;
Its yawning sides dark inns for gusts from West
And East to wander in as welcome guest.
Within, I see a rough-hewn resinous pine
Blaze sootily, a twofold meed in fine
Bestowing, heat and light; whilst fast, from out
The chimney-hole stove in the roof, a rout
And smudge of black and wind-tossed smoke sails forth,
As might fell sorcerer's imps from bowels of earth,
Upon some ghoulish mission bent.

As yet

No sign of life my anxious sight had met
To cheer it, and I marvelled much, in sooth,
Not with unmixed awe, if eld or youth,
What mannered man,—or beast, if such might be,—
Might call this cave his home: when, presently,
The unleashed winds with fiendish hissing sound,

In the wake of mighty cracks of the quaking ground,
And detonations of the bursting wall
Of heaven above, rend wildly the umbrous pall
Within the den, disclosing, calmly seated,
Amidst the din the viewless gods created,
A venerable old man; his hoary locks,
Dishevelled by the gale, which sorely mocks
At age; his long, white, flowing beard low gently
Sweeping his breast like snow-drifts on Soracte:
A very Cronos of eternal night!
His eyes, beneath his beetling brows gleam bright
As baited lynx; and wound about his gaunt
And bony frame in wind-blown folds that haunt
His angularity, a cloak he wore;
Its yoke was studded round with thunder-stones;
The clasp was carven out of whale's bones;
Cerulean 't was of hue, old, faded, o'er
The which deft fingers,—haply Pallas of
The azure eye—had broidered for mere love
Daedalian, weird designs of the immortal great:
The Olympian dwellings of the gods; the gate
Of roseate cloud, kept by the wingèd Hours;
The gods and goddesses themselves—thrones—powers—
Eye-dazzling mortals; Hebe nectar pouring,

What time the Delphian, divinely soaring,
His golden lyre twanged; in melodies
The Muses rapt before Apollo's eyes:
It seemed a mockery 'neath these sodden skies!
Under the old man's agèd feet soft lies
A pelt of spotted gray wolf's dam; upon
The reechy walls a time-worn sickle gone
To rust; a broken spar, some galley oars,
Some tattered fishers' nets, whose snaring chores
Being done, they did but gape through broken strands;
The old man held in 's gnarled and trembling hands
A necromancer's glass, with silver bands,
Slowly from which a stream of amber sands
Was falling to the ground.

Albeit I stood

Within the purlieus of his glance, his brood
Saturnine startled not,—he still pursued,
All heedlessly his cryptic task. Whereat,
I, troubled, spoke, belying fear, begat
By's 'havior,—like a torrent icèd o'er
Rages beneath:—"I pray thee, sire,—" the roar,
Most demoniacal of the elements,
Half-drown my piping words of sound and sense,—

“Creature akin in race of Aryan womb,
O tell me where I am, and why this doom
Maleficent, outhorroring in rage
The hundred-headed Typhon’s hellish wage
’Gainst heaven—to which we twain appear the lone
And hapless witnesses? this thunder-sown,
Dread spectacle, than which the galled fiends blown
From Tartarus, let loose to decimate
Themselves in gory battle’s blind-driven fate,
Were not one tithe as numbing in its hate?
And sire, O say, if prophet, seer in might,
Where stays the beauteous maid Rhodanthe? Last night
I knelt in Beauty’s bower imparadised;
To-day, plunged in the maelstrom, demonized,
Of damnèd souls! O why with rack amerced?
What Hecate broods o’er this haunt accursed?
And who are they that call me from the trees?

The tawny trickling rill of sandy lees
Slowly outran its course, ere that at me
This Nestor of the storm upglancèd. He
O’ergazed me grimly with his glaucous eyes;
Then in their depths the feeble lustre dies;
Then, down the corners of his bloodless lips,

Which curl with leer sardonic, lewdly drips,
Meseems, envenomed hate. He drew his cloak;
Then toneless words as from the tomb he spoke:

“For thee, fond youth, I here am waiting long:
‘Last night,’ thou say’st? I heard thine even-song
Aeons ago! I’ve reckoned cycles since
Thou fell’st asleep, insensate Fairy Prince,
Who kindled Beauty’s ruin with a kiss
Of clay—to forge thy sempiternal bliss!
These grains of sand in periodicity
Do symbol centuries! Time’s knell for thee,
Hath struck in full its whirligig. ‘Last night,’”
He jeered, “the last Greek Calends soared their flight!
The quavering course of mortals and immortals
Is run! Thou art the last to pass the portals
Into oblivion. The dynasty
Of famed Olympus fallen, the deity
Dethroned, deserted, in cold darkness dying!
King Pan’s stone dead! Ay, e’en the Sibyl’s sighing,
Which lone endured of her nigh deathless life,
Hath breathed upon the winds its last. The strife
Vainglorious of the mad young planet, whence
Thou hail’st, fierce general wars with violence
Did fearfully destroy; it wound its story,

Leaving no vestige of its wanton glory.
Rhodanthe?" he flouted. "Ha! That hell morose,
Where thou awak'st, held once her garden-close;
Her wood, through which thou hither cam'st, was late
The hades of the Hamadryads' fate,
Sylvani damned, of Fauns, and Satyrs dire,
Whose heinous crimes deep roused to vengeful ire
The omnific gods; and here ingloriously
Imprisoned, to expiate eternally
Their faults, were they addoomed, had godly gyves
Immortal proved. On their defiant lives,
So rathely plucked, the curse fell heavily;
Forthwith, they felt the rough bark balefully
Dam up their expiatory moans and cries;
Seeling the tear-drops in their piteous eyes;
Their feet in rock-clefts rooted midst alarms;
A-sudden branches warped their lifted arms,
Hardened to skyward in a mute appeal:
And thus mewed up in trees, with forcèd zeal,
They ordered were to fill the forest glades,
In death continual, that but the end evades,
Sharing a fate Promethean; for in their night
Of doom,—which naught save demon-fires light,
The while they loathly gloat on their distress,—

They never knew the feel of that caress,
That cool, hushed murmur of the zephyrs, fan
Their withering tops; or sap, that swiftly ran
Throughout their limbs; or heard sweet whispering leaves,
Or sensed the sway of their huge trunk as 't cleaves
With lealty deep-bosomed mother-earth,—
Although the darling of the winds since birth;
Or plumed their budding foliage in the sun:
But vainly yearned for Spring Saturnian,
Which never bloomed again in their old life.
For all 'twixt them and nature now was strife,
And bitterest combat of the elements;
The wanton West-winds, the Favonian, tense,
From jaded resting in the Aeolian Isles,
Came revelling through their woe-begotten wilds,
Shrieking infernal glee; they sweep the bare
And piteous spirit-trees to earth, and tear
The poor and bleeding roots, that strive to hold
Their fresh-knit tendons in the cracking mould;
Exultingly the extended arms are wrenched
From groaning sockets scarcely healed; and drenched
With pelting floods of hail-stones till aghast,
The limbs are lacerated to the last
Few quivering leaves; then, with despairing cries,

They see afar hurled from the black-wombed skies,
The blood-red thunderbolts, time and again,
Come crashing in their hearts; and, rent in twain,
They totter, yield, then tumbling headlong, rolled
Like tortured giants in agonies untold."

He ceased, and said, as he the shadows kenned:
"But now the World is winding to its end!
Nature, the Beautiful, which thou hast worshipped
As Idol, with her dazzling countenance, dipped
In sparkling liquid emeralds and pearls,
Blackens and dies; her meadow brooklet purls
No more of 's spirit-god; her waterfall
Hangs lifeless in her death-bed silvery pall,
Athwart the buried rocks: all that 's divine,
Informing with ethereal grace her shrine
Ephemeral, fadeth like the myths of Man,
Who peopled the elusive heights Elysian.
And Man, who yearnèd so for gods, his role
Is played; he, who did yoke the soul
Of man and maid with tree and plant and flower,
To endue all Nature with a subtle power
And being of celestial beauty—strove
To forge them irrefrangibly in love—

Learns that her day of dissolution dawns;
Her erstwhile flowery, fulgent face, Death yawns
To Nothingness! The roses of her earth
Lie wilted, and her forests of ancient birth,
Belch from their bowels forth the genii
That in them lived, with longing but to die.
The mortal canker mocks the immortal gods!"

This trenchantly; then on his discourse plods:

"Recall'st that shattered oak, which prostrate lay,
And lopped thy path with tremulous limbs? How gay
It tossed its leafy mane superbly high
In callow days! Know, that in 's wormèd, wry,
And blackened shell immured, there lived one time
In penal woe, that outworn ghost of crime,
Japetus named, the Titan born, who laughed
To scorn the mighty Zeus, 'rayed 'gainst the craft
Of Cronos and his kin. Thus Nature shunned
His most unnatural lapse. Ah, thou art stunned
At this recital—wait!" he, smiling, said:

"In yon wild olive tree there languishèd,
The relic of that tender shepherd lad,
The Apulian youth, who impiously had
Defamed the dancing nymphs loved by the gods;

His bitter tongue tastes in the acrid pods,
Crumbling to ashes in the Avernian breeze!—
The calls thou heard'st came from the poplar trees;
Yea, from the imprisoned daughters of the Sun,
Who still for Phaeton mourn. I saw, my son,
Thy heart, which ever melts at woman's tears,
To list the suppliance of these woodland dears,
Was sorely tempted. Ha!" he taunting sneers,—
And then resumeth: "Buried 'neath the dun
Nocturnal cypress, thou didst fast o'er-run
The Sun-god's favorite, Cyparissus, he,
Once lovely Cea's pride, who, wofully,
Long-time bemoaned his soft and milk-white forehead.—
Look you, here 't was fair Dryope was led,
Most beautiful of all the Occhalian maids,
With her sweet boy Amphissus, to the shades
Purpureal of Lotus blossoms, which,
Daring to pluck, her lovely hands grew rich
Encarnadined with blood of the bleeding flower;
'T was Lotis, and her fate was doomed that hour;—
She felt the nymph's dread curse: she pleads; she grieves;
She strives to tear her hair—her hands with leaves
Are filled; she lifts her little son to her;
He cries,—he feels his mother's breast,—where myrrh

And honey of his childhood dreams had flowed,—
Grow hard, rough-rinded as the wartèd toad;
Over the soft white neck the bark creeps froze,
Then seals the lips—her kisses are no more!
She long repented in the Lotus hearsed.—
Here Myrrha, in sylvestral cloister 'mersed,
Bewailed her most unhappy love; her tree
Its amber tear drops shed unceasingly.—
There, 'mong dead blossoms of the Almond bare,
Which fringed thy way, thou heard'st upon the air
Faintly, the plaintive murmurings of Phyllis;
The loss of her Demophoön, ah, still is
That woe her wail—that he returned to see,
Alas, her charms merged in the Almond tree:
O lover false! O how for him she yearned!—
But 't is enough! Innumerable they, interned,—
Whose well-remembered names, like April rains,
Smelt sweet on earth,—long did in pines, and planes,
And lindens, silvery poplars, beeches, rage,—
Peopling this forest, which in the Golden Age
Emblazoned Tempe;—clapped in Jove-made tombs,
Of the Underworld deep down as in earth's wombs,
Still-born and cursed. Some, who, like Phoebus, sighing
For Daphnes, in the eternal laurel dying;

And many wood-nymphs, love-shaked, their sad lot
To long some Rhoecus, who his tryst forgot.
Thus helpless, hopeless, these, with ululations,
Befouled for aeons long the air—while nations
Of men inurned their memories in love,
And thought them spherèd in the stars above;
Their fate, unknown, to curse their former life,
Whose fields they sowed with cockle-faults full rife:—
Thus trespasses against the deity,
'Gainst Nature's works and wonders was to die;
As now she 's doomed, and all her genii!
So art thou answered and the reason why."

He paused, and watched the inky clouds distend;
Then cried: "But life's grim woes wind to their end;
For mortal matter mocks the immortal god,
And Fate relentless flays us 'neath her rod!"

His dark, mysterious prophecy's grist,
My restless patience dares o'erleap its list:
"Enough! Enough!" I groaned; "thou seem'st to boast
For I am gallowed on this spectral coast;
How have I sinned that I should be so crossed?
And why to me incontinently lost,
Is all the heaven of the Flowery Isle?"

The cat-like eyes glint with a steely smile,
Beneath their shaggy beetling brows of night:
"Thou dar'st to ask!" he thundered, like the might
Of Neptune's deep chafed into bellowings,
Until my heart throbbed fast as sea-mews wings,
Breasting the ruthless blast of wind and ocean:
"Dar'st ask? O thou intemperate Boeotian!
Thou overweening pilgrim from the base
And unregenerate globe! son of the race,
Which sand-blind sought'st the bubble Happiness,
As though it topped the peaks of all Success!
Didst thou not make the Heaven of Earthly Beauty
Thine all-absorbing quest, and destiny
Supercelestial? Beauty, and her minion
Of Love, ascendant in thy heart's dominion,
Over the gifts of all the gods, or goal,
Which might have cradled thine immortal soul
In bowers of eternal bliss hereafter?
Ay; and like fools that force Homeric laughter,—
Ay, like all men,—like even the deities
Olympian, who their sacrosanctities
In this same arrogance forgot,—to teem
All history with this madness o'er a dream,
This bootless chase for Beauty's Will-o-wisp!

And yet, since first thou learnedst Art's golden lisp,
Thou wast soft coddled with a nice precision,
Until vouchsafed Life's beatific vision,
And leave to love fair Beauty's full-blown flower,
Rhodanthe, the nonpareil, of rarest dower,
That doting Nature e'er devised for those,
Who solve her secret underneath the rose:
This maid, who for earth's richest prize beseems;
Whose loveliness divine no mortal dreams
Surpassed!—And thou, blind 'fore her deathless flame,
Both won and lost her to the eternal shame!
Thou sigh'st; alas! to sigh it is too late.”

“Ah, dear Rhodanthe!” I moaned, crushed by my fate
Tellurian, “who can measure my despair?
Thou prize, far richer than Atlanta rare,
Or Dian, to the illimitable love
Of gods! or those divinities, above
The common race of man in the world's decree,
Who dazzled the Idalian groves with beauty!
O woe is me, remembering in my distress,
Thy countenance of ecstatic loveliness;
Glowing celestial—rosy as Aurora,

When forth she blithely sails to greet the day,
Dight in her ruddy gloryings!—Ah me!”—

“And thou mightst still, entrancèd utterly,—
Imparadised in contemplation of
Thy goddess,—basked thee ever in her love!”
Baited my tempter of the Aetnean snows,—
“But that bright heaven of the exquisite Rose
Of Beauty, which, to worship with a passion
Repured, in lowly, loving adoration,
Had ransomed thee, thou turnèdst to thy hell!
Oh, it had shrived thee better than book and bell!
Perchance, redeemed thee, and all men from doom
Irrevocable now; ay, and thy gloom
Despicable of death had not been added,
Within the very dell, whilere engladded,
Hadst thou not shown the cloven of thy clay!”

He stopped.—“But I did worship her, I say!
Ay, dreamed to set her highest in the heaven!
Higher,” I cried, “than any the immortal Seven!
In hymns diurnal, Beauty had I crowned
With diadem of stars; made her renowned
In song and story from the Antarctic snows

To Nilus!"— But he sneered, with seeming gloze:
"For that thou strovest in thy small, smug way,
In thy cramped sphere, thy tiny ball of clay,
Thine earth, to build in beauty emulous
Of heaven,—but, O, with aim so covetous!
And, O, with what infinity of fault!—
So wast thou blest: and when, in brave assault,
Thou erst essayed to scale the battlements
Of high endeavor, keeping, like perfumed incense,
A holy love intreasurèd within
Thy fretful heart, thou wast that gift akin
To gods accorded,—ay, that fatal glimpse
Into the Flowery Isle of the Flower-nymphs,
Celestial bourne of dreams terrestrial;
Fair Flora's everlasting festival:
With peerless draughts at Beauty's crystal fount;
With muskèd taste of love-wine, tantamount
To that, which turned the head of Adon, when
He zoned the cestus of the Paphian:
An eye-wink in the sacred mysteries,
Behind those intertangled tapestries
Of myrtles and of roses;—and withal,
A something of that light of love eternal,
To which, O foolish mortal, thou mightst aspire,

Hadst thou not 'fore that idol, built of mire,
All basely grovelled, as 't were heavenly dew,
The earth-jade, Comeliness!"

"'T is false!"

"'T is true!

Thou didst like any perked-up moonstruck churl,
Grossly pollute, as though some peasant girl,
In bold embrace of love impassionate,
The ethereal bright Rhodanthe! didst desecrate,
With lips irreverent, that rose-bud fair,
And virgin-honeyed mouth, no human dare
Defile and live! Wherefore, thou meet'st with Death,
Whose terminus here marks thy latest breath."

"Was then not Beauty, heaven-born, for love—
Instilled within us by the Power above?

"Ay, love that heavenward soared!—but man did pale
With ignomy before her Holy Grail:
Either with envy, hate, hypocrisy,
Or sin more rank, he soiled her sanctity;
And killed the flower,—as thou didst this,—
Beauty, the Spirit, with an earthy kiss!

Man should have Beauty, heaven-born, with eyes
Revering, adorations, ardors, sighs
Soul-shaking, hallowedly, devoutly yearned;
In rapturous contemplation inward burned
His heart's desire, with such majesty
To pinnacle, in 's thronèd empery!—
But man, the Canker—thou—didst mine the fair
Chaste bud; so Death, avengeant, to her lair
Hath tracked thee!”

“Cannot Love absolve me there?”

“Thy soul, from its crass sin, may not be purged!
Conversion is there not, as Sophists urged,
Passing from Shades Plutonian up to Heaven;
Here dost thou find the meal without the leaven—
Destruction absolute—and Life's sealed door.—
For thee, now, Beauty reigneth never more!
The Paphian curve outblotted by thy frailty!
Empyreal Beauty blasted by thy folly!
Its fountain in thy heart mere mould upheaves.
Rhodanthe is dead! Love's flower, like the leaves
Of the Rose now faded on thy heart of care,
Hath spent its fragrance on the ingrate air.

Ah, woe the world! Again hath barbèd Beauty,
To gods and men brought down calamity!
Again Cassiopea's dazzling awe;
Again Pandora, eke Andromeda,
Destroy, as Helen did, who set afire
The twanging strings of Homer's Delphic lyre,
Reverberating through enchanting ages!
Beauty is dead! and Nature's rout presages
Annihilation. Time, that was to be,
Endures not more that fell catastrophe!
Together must we mount the rolling tide
Into eternal Nothingness, and bide
The end of Life's worm-gnawèd book," my guide
Dilated, adding quick; "Come, follow me!"
And saying which, descended toward the sea,
With ponderous gait, and bent upon his staff.
His blazing eyes, his mocking ribald laugh,
His old-world mien, his flying snake-like locks,
Struck terror; and as 'mid the jaggèd rocks,
Piled round him by the play of centuries,
Laboriously he treads, with scornful ease
Tossing aside the blasts and torrent streams,
That smite his nakedness, he strangely seems
Some long-forgotten giant of genesis,

Begat in embryonic Time's abyss,
When first the gods called forth the unalloyed
Congealing matter from the mists of Void.

And as I dragged my leaden feet in 's track,
New and unspeakable Fear's procrustean-rack,
Tortured my soul—for o'er me loomed the wraith
Portentous, ominous of my unfaith—
The fate inexorable I could not shun
Of my impending dissolution.
Dully, like ox wreathed for the slaughter's rite,
Weirdly impelled, I went; cold beads of fright
Bedanked my brow; whilst like twin aspens trembling
My knees upbore me scarcely: but, dissembling,—
Having no stomach for adventures more,
And marvelling the goal toward which he bore,—
I called to inquire if from these imperilments,
This damned upheaval of the elements,
I truly would not to my "crampèd sphere,"
My "tiny ball of earth" return—which, dear
To me before, now beckoned smilingly,
With outstretched arms, as if, indeed, to me
It never had doled out but halcyon peace
And happiness undefiled.

With no surcease
Of step, he turned his fiend-like face and form,
Shrieking with voice of sea-gull in a storm:
“We ’re on our way to the engulphing end!
The gods were myths, and on the tide we tend,
Which shall blot out the earth and moon and sun,
Ay, heaven and hell. Hereafter is there none!
No more shall mortal pasture with the hind;
No more the lazy Triton shall unwind
His wreathèd conch, where moon-kist water laves
The shore; or sea-nymphs quire to the waves,
The while they comb their lucent hair; no more
Shall sirens lure to star-ypaven floor
Of Neptune’s empery;—but continents,
Puissant before, shall sink in impotence;
Our grave the ocean bed—and worms shall feast
Upon ’s, till ooze and worm, and thou, the least
Consistent parasite,—and I, blown hence,
Dissolve into the pregnant waters whence
We sprung, and all from thy irreverence!”
He laughed a raucous laugh, which froze my blood.

“False prophet, thou!” I cried, “to tempt yon flood
I ’ll follow thee no more! But tell, I pray,

If lives no higher Power, who guides thy way?"
But if the wind-imps clipped my weak-winged words,
Or they were drownèd by the cries of birds,
Or that my grisly mentor them ignored
Through supercilious scorn, my query soared
Away unanswered yet;—and on his heels
I trudged in silence, fearful, as one feels,
When super-nature awes the puerile speech,—
Until at last an inlet dark we reach.
It jutted 'long a towering cliff from shore,
On whose huge bouldered base the waters hoar,
With catapultic force, had battered in
A deep cavernous antre; black within
As Erebus it shone below the ledge
O'erhanging. Here low stooping on the edge
Of its rapacious maw, laboriously
And slow, the gaunt old Titan tugged, till he
Dragged forth a ponderous jangling iron chain,
Which seemed from time primordial there to have lain;
And presently in view did weirdly float,
A weather-beaten, water-logged, black boat;
Its curvèd prow nosed high in the embrownèd air,
As if it sniffed some curious business there.
All-startled at the phantom-gloomy hulk,

So like a fateful monster, back I skulk,
My heart so numb that I my Charon charge:
“Is ’t possible, that with this rotten barge,
Thou ’lt tempt the treachery of yon furious main?”
He minded not—and as it heaved again,
Belching full out its dark and ancient crib,
Its antique carcass and each calcined rib,
To me all of its sad decay displayed.
He hobbled in unsteadily, and laid
Adown his staff and took the rough-hewn oar;
Then signalled me jump in and push from shore—
“Ye gods!” I groan, “’t is madness sheer! he raves,
Who dares yon black and welkin-kissing waves!
Go an thou wilt—I to the wood of fire,
Rather than risk the unbridled tempest’s ire!”

“Then to the wood!” he gibed, “Amphibian!”
Impulsively I turned to look upon
The land from which I came—but I no more
Than tops of charred and leafless trees a score
Could see—for by the cloud-breaks deluged o’er,
A flood on land now rolls to join the sea!
“’Tis cormorant!” he mocked with savage glee;
“Best tempt the main; see, mortal, how for thee

The spooming ocean chafes unfettered; thou
The bowels of her wrath can halcyon now:
Cruel her rage since Day deigns not to dawn;
No more upon her bosom doth Vesper fawn;
No more love-spangled Moonlight pranks her gold,
Or soothes her deep-pulsating heart of old:
Soon shall her massing flood engulf the world,
Nor shall the Mountain of the Muse uphurled,
Cradle a new Deucalion!"

What choice?

Half-dazed, I find the seat: he doth rejoice
Lewdly, methinks, and forthright toward the ocean,
We 're with the sculler's sharp propelling motion,
Shot swiftly 'long the broad cliff's leeward bank.
At every impulse—every crunching clank,
The churnèd waters wilder wax; to me
They frenzied seem to mingle with the sea.
My rising fears in fresh alarms accresce,
As fast the promontory's bulk grows less;
As our frail bark a-tremble scents her fate,—
The batteries of waves infuriate,
Helpless to breast, as with their mightier pinions,
They on our gunwales fasten their dominions.

And, stroke by stroke, we make the open flood!
On every side of us, the quivering brood
Of lapping waves onrush with deadlihood;
Roaring like demons, down the cliff's base gone,
As though their goal were straight to Phlegethon;
Before, behind us, swirling eddies strive
To englut our helpless craft, and suck alive
Its human freight down caves, where winnoeth
The restless tide the trophies of grim Death.
And shriller, shriller, whistle the exultant winds,
As oft-times through lone melancholy pines,
I've heard their haunting funeral dirges gray;
Whilst gulls and sea-mews, phantomed in the spray
O'erhead, like vengeful spectres, ruthless wind
Fate's ghastly shroud about me, grovelling blind
Within her power; and, above their cries,
Resounds the thunderous boom, and fell reprise
To come of Ocean's rage, her every fume,
Roused from her deep unfathomable womb,
Wrought up in passion inexhaustible.

O potent hand of Fate inexorable!
Now like a cockle spewed into the deep,
We in the black tumultuous ocean leap;

Around us billows roar and writhe in fray,
Gloating to greet their groaning helpless prey.
They hurdle us with glee o'er ridge and crest;
They hurtle us about north, east, and west;
Now yawning craters gape leagues down beneath
Our quivering keel; now, holding in my breath,
I wait, while dizzy toppling walls of waves,
Like liquid avalanches ope our graves—
And sepulchred below the engulfing masses,
I smother;—but we right-up in crevasses,
Until again tossed high, a perilous speck,
Topping a watery crag—a pitiful wreck!—
Half-hidden in the murk of pitch-black clouds,
From whose distended bellies pours in shrouds
The doomful rain in merciless derision.
I clutch in fearful desperation,
The crackling gunwales of our craft; I gasp—
My breath whelmed by the buffeting wind; I clasp
My poor heart, panting frightened 'gainst its side
In dire panic: O no more in Springtide,
Warm, awakening, will it pulse at hide-and-seek,
At Cupid's bashful, tender, rosy cheek!
No more soft music beat as bird's sweet breath,
Dreamless of carking hate of storm and death!

Out, out upon the vasty surge we 're blown!
Wave-swept, but still as Maenad carved in stone,
Rooted by magic on the barge's poop,
With darkened mien, and imperturbable stoop,
My pilot stands unmoved as on a heath,
Or country-side; while on, into the teeth
Of tortured Ocean's fierce convulsive throes,
We steadily steer—nor at the craven's woes,
Crouched at his feet, deigns he a look of ruth,—
Nay, not an empty word.

At last, forsooth,
The lengthening vales 'twixt ocean's mountain-chain,
Seemed some surcease of danger on the main
To lend our wretchèd bark; and I, the feel
Of O, a flickering hope deep-sensed of weal,—
When lo! I saw my agèd steersman raise
Himself to preternatural heighth; the blaze
Of glowing coals in his sunk orbits flared,
As in the veil of mist and spray he stared
Expectant. Suddenly, with wildering shout
Like maniacal glee of loonish lout,
His stretched forefinger darts he in the gloom:
“Look! Look! It comes!” he cried, “the doom! the doom!

Now will that teach thee prayer!" He laughed. "At last!
It is the grand climacteric!" Aghast,
I gazed ahead—while 's mocking laughter clanked,
Clogging my blood-streams, and my brow bedanked
With cold congealing sweat.—O sight to quake
The stoutest heart! O throes of hell's black lake!
There, on the dark horizon rolling low,
Toward us, surely, ponderously slow,
A mighty moving mountain-wave in bulk;
Rolling toward us like a giant in sulk;
Rolling in stature higher as it flows;
Rolling toward us with its pack of woes,
A Nemesis—outspreading its advance,
Along the breadth of ocean's wide expanse,
As if the tides of all Eternity,
In one uprolled, had demonized the sea,—
By cataclysmic, vast, upheaving lust,
Upbulging high the quaked earth's stubborn crust,—
And tracked us, outcasts, on the tempest tossed.
"Ye gods!" I wailed. "What shall we do? We're lost!"
Down at his feet I knelt, imploring—prayed—
He answered not; nay, rather seemed he paid
A silent tribute to wild nature's spleen,
And awful grandeur of that ocean scene,

That ghoulisb triumph of destruction,
As it approached. A weird and strange seduction
Softened his features—as he watched the gray
And terrorizing front, by lightning's play
Ghastly illumined on its lumbering way:
Now lurid, phosphorescent, livid-green;
Now lost in Stygian night; now, in its sheen,
Dim spectres dance in hellish ecstasy,
And flit across its dread immensity;
Now fearfully in air its sides upleap,—
As thunderbolts in volleys rock the deep,
And shake it centre to circumference:
Now sinks it down as worn to impotence,
While low cloud-racks, which rumble on like drums,
Lend it their haggard company—On it comes!

Crouched in the barge's bilgy bottom lay
I drenched, and dripping with the cold salt spray;
Each tendon strained, each nerve wracked taut to stay
The oncoming adamantine shock. With awe
Half-dazed, half-dead, mine eyes bulge out; my jaw
Convulsive chatters, and all will ignores;
My dammed-up terror breaks forth from my pores
In multitudinous beads of clammy sweat;

My eyes burn blind with lashing brine beset,—
And on it comes! Already on its swells
We ominously heave and fall—the feel that spells
The final dissolution. Louder wail
The winds their dirge funereal! and the hail
And rain, and ocean shriek with bursting lungs;
And wild waves lick us with their lickerish tongues,
Like lolling ravening beasts a-thirst to seize
Their nigh death-clutchèd prey with treacheries
Immitigate. Alas, a little prayer
To lisp—What end? since all things whatsoe'er
Supernal now succumb even as we do!
O ghastly thought!—Ye gods, who did imbrue
This mind with majesty, so that far through
The Elysian fields of thought, 'mid lightning gleams,
It winged a gorgeous flight! O golden dreams
Of courts and castle-towns that heavenward rise!
Ye lovely visions of a Paradise
To come,—that like an incense-perfumed fire,
Quick from a heart with rapturous desire
Aflame, lit bright our destiny divine,
With rainbow-hues all rose and sapphirine,
To lure us on!—ye in the mists dissolve!
Ye die crushed 'neath the water-wheels revolve

Of Ocean's Juggernaut, in direful might,
Never to wake from Sleep's eternal night!
O earthly body, prized, with love bedight;
By nature mothered, by her music lulled,—
Soon soulless, eyeless, cold, to senses dulled,
A clod, thou'lt glut the dark insatiable maw
Of Ocean's Scavenger!—Thus stricken with awe
I mused all hopeless—when, with impact dead,
Titanic, irresistible, and dread,
The mountain-billow whirled us in the air
Like chaff. I clutched the boat's sides in despair,
Balanced upon the lofty foaming crest
Of the enshafed flood; its quivering breast
Wavered a moment's flash, then back we're hurled
Ten fathoms deep into a nether world,
With oceanic force—ejecting me
Into the seething furnace of the sea.
The rotten boat is kindling 'round me strown:
Half-stunned, half-choked, distraught,—half-dead,—I groan
With woe-o'erwhelming—searching through the brine
Engulphing, for the Avenger—for some sign,
Some last companionable glance,—for crass,
Shag-eared, uncouth, he was a man, alas,
And creature like myself!—but he is gone,

And in the embattling flood I am alone:
But o'er the booming surge, like tolling bell
At sea that mournful sounds life's last farewell,
I hear his wingèd words float on the air:—
“Fear not—it is thy fate—fond youth and fair:
Thy dizzy moth down-tumbled from the stars!
Thine endless seeking, through life's jousts and jars,
Did win the incomparable Rhodanthe for thee,—
The embodiment of all the World of Beauty,—
But compassed not thy soul-yearned happiness.
She was a phantom of ephemeralness!
And for thy bootless pains and fond delusion,
To drink the hemlock cup of dissolution
Conseques; and now is Death's heredity
Thine undistributable patrimony.
Now 'FINIS' in thy Book of Life impress:
Learn like thy forbears in their heart's distress,
In Beauty only lies not Happiness!
Thy gods were myths! Hereafter is there none!—
Thou diest forever—and my work is done!”—

It ceased, that awful voice of doom; and all
Waxed still, save, in the night's enveloping pall,
The swish and whirr battailous of the wind

And wave, which lash and buffet me sore-blind.
In fierce dynamic strife about the sea
I fight for life,—O sweeter now to me,
Were't but to save Rhodanthe's bright memory
From dying with the death of me! I leap
Up mountained billow-ridges—and in the deep
Of icy blackness sink, where I 'm assailed
By multitudinous sea-monsters, mailed,
That ravening bait at me; and lichens, weeds,
With cold and clammy fingers,—foul breeds
And parasitics of the ocean,—bruise
Me as they drag me to their beds of ooze,
A thousand furlongs down.

By dour defence,

I free me from their rank entanglements;
And weary, woe-worn, to the surface rise.
Lo! everywhere for leagues, to my surprise,
The angry waters lie all tranquil bright,
All bathed in an ambrosial rosy light;
And, o'er my head, through chasms blue for miles,
A heavenly vision vistaed,—golden aisles
Of Gothic distances, as far as eye
Can reach; while sentinel lilies glorify

The flower-paven alleys of the sky,
And lead unto a bower. There I beheld,
On dais raised, with damask roses stelled,
The peerless maid, Rhodanthe; she tristly smiles,—
O wilding heart that beats with hope's fond wiles!—
A moment breathes the enchanted effluence
Its heavenly ardors on my awèd sense,
Then melts the vision swiftly as a breath
Melteth into air—O dream of Death!
Alas, was 't a mirage to illume the way?
A wistful hope of eke a happier day?
O bitterest woe!—Heart gloomed, for my last sleep,
Back to the yearning waters of the deep,
I give my self—while all the welkin rings
With fiendish laughter, roars, and bellowings
Unintermitted, as though imps of hell
Victoriously exulted in my fell
Destruction; and again, weird voices moan
Upon the waters: "'Tis the end! Atone,
Fond youth, for all thy wanton self-esteem;
'Tis pity thou didst labor so to dream;
The mystic Sophists stuffed thy Deities,
And built Hereafter for Man's tyrannies:
The World is dead and Beauty's dead—thy muse

Will find her gold hair in the muddy ooze—
Where in Oblivion lie thou evermore!”—

Loud roared the Deep's doxology, as o'er
My disappearing head the seething yeast
Of churnèd waters jubilantly feast
In victory. As though my heart from 's breast
Pent-up must burst, I gasp,—then, sleepily rest,
By black engulphing depths fore'er obsessed.

BOOK IV

L'ENVOI

“Perchè la faccia mia sì t'innamora . . . ?”
Così Beatrice.

Dante: Par. xxiii, 70-76.

*Why doth my face enamour thee?
The light of all eternity,
Resplendent blazons yonder, see—
The Gardens of the Rosary!*

*It blossoms 'neath Christ's loving rays,
Bowered with chants of seraph's lays:
O wander through its flowered ways,
These paradisal Easter days.*

*Here is the Rose, wherein the Word
Divine incarnate was preferred
Of womankind,—her petals stirred—
Her perfumed prayers in Heaven are heard.*

*And here the sentinel Lilies stand,
Whose odors bare the Holy Band,
And guide into the Promised Land—
Then give Our Lady Love thy hand.*

A cry of terror 'scapes my lips; hard-pressed,
I wake: my teeth are chattering with affright,
Fell and unspeakable, from loathsome sight
Of vile misshapen monsters of the wave;
From carking cold of my deep ocean grave,
Whose muddied cerements gyve me still her slave.
I shiver—I am dank from horrors wild—
And yet, methinks, a song even now beguiled
Me into waking. Was 't "The Rose Celestial,"
Once Beatrice sang?—or dream terrestrial?
I rub my unbelieving eyes—I find—
Certes, I 'm safe from storm and wave and wind,
Within the old familiar frescoed walls
Of Rosamund's garden-close, where softly falls
The April sunlight—and which trails its glory
On Florence's Lung' Arno, wreathed in story.
There rise the red-tiled roofs, the cypress hills,
The poplars by the river, and the light that fills
With orient turquoise of the Tuscan skies
The crystal air. Can I believe mine eyes?
"*O bella città dei fiori!*" cries,
Florence, to thee, my heart in ecstasies.
Then, all my woes innumerable, the theme
And figment of a wild fantastic dream,
Forsooth, must be! Ay, for athwart a row

Of sentinel lilies, white as Luni's snow,
I see beneath a bower of vermeil roses
My Rosamund stands, and of my dream disposes
The last illusion,—save those lucent hours,
When blissfully bewildered 'mong the flowers,
I could not tell my loved one from the showers
Elusive pink and white. 'Twas she! a-glowing
Even as now—her dimpled arms o'erflowing
With freshly-gathered florets of every hue,
Dripping with diamonds of nectareous dew,—
Daedalian nature's picturesque mosaics,—
That glad me, gloom-sick from the slimed agarics
Of ocean's sunless caves.—O roseate smiles!
O was it strange I sought in flowering isles
The garden so enflowered in her face?
The rose reflected with ineffable grace
In her soft damask cheek?—the gentian blue
Trembling in her seraphic eyes so true?
Her temples white as snow-drops—'gainst which presses
Like curling king-cups, her bright golden tresses?
Oh, how methought, at first—with woe-distraught—
The winter's icy fangs my Rose had raught,
And killed her love and beauty,—till the thought
Phantasm 'fore the light of truth succumbs.—

I call her. All in smilets wreathed she comes:
I touch her hands—ah, they are tender, warm;
I laugh with leaping joy—my circling arm
Stealeth about her with the olden charm:
O, with exuberant glee, I fain would yell—
Like one who well hath 'scaped the pangs of hell!

“Thy brief siesta’s robbed the clock of hours,”
She laughs. “’Tis noon! See, all the heavenly flowers
Our garden grows in its terrestrial sphere:
This chaplet’s for the Lady Chapel, dear,—
St. Mary of the Flowers. Look!” she cries,
Thrusting into my face earth’s jewelled prize,
The dancing lovelight brimming o’er blue eyes.
I gasp: “Thank heaven, a dream!”

“I pray, what dream?”

“A dream within a dream; for it did seem,
I wandered in thy garden, sore-bereaved,
For I had lost thee, love,—and as I grieved,
By the Archimage of Sleep I was thence lulled
Proteanly to Flora’s Garden, culled
With rarest blooms that none could it compare:

And in a maid, Rhodanthe, I worshipped there
The embodiment of Earthly Beauty. Ah,
Forgetting, in my heavened Utopia,
Her pure immortal spirit: for which offense
Into a loathsome Hades plungèd thence,
I, plangent, wandered, till into the sea
They cast me of a black obliquity.
O horrent dream!—That gods were myths, I heard;
Hereafter, there was none,—and, sepulchred
Forever, I could never be with thee,
My love again—O cruel destiny!—
But all's translated now to joy enthralling!
Aroused from an Inferno of ills appalling,
To find the angelic guards, Serenity, Peace,
Encompassing my soul; to find surcease
Of misery and pain my smiling firmament;
And riches, beauty, love, and sweet content
Unmeasured rain, my Rosamund, for me,—
Sweet Bride o' the Canticles, pure, good, and comely:
Come kiss me—and with thy pure spirit bless,
Rose of my dream, my world of happiness!"

"Alas," she smiles, "thou dost imparadise
Thine earthly Rosamund, and her love o'erprize!"

I warned thee, whilst I read to thee—'t was wrong;—
And, as thou wov'st into a little song,
The gentle words that Beatrice spake
Unto her Florentine,—his love to slake—
To turn him to the Garden blossoming
Beneath the rays of Christ,—thy dream took wing;—
Thy 'Dante' closed—in sleep went rapturing!—
With mundane Love, too much, thou 'st diademmed
Thy jewelled-crown of Happiness; and gemmed
A little world with maiden's pink-white cheek—
Forgetting still the higher goal to seek:
That terrene Beauty hath this task supreme,
To mount the Jacob's Ladder in her dream
Celestial, teaching Love, her handmaid, rise
On golden treaders to God's galleries,
Where she shall live forever in the skies.
Thou dreamedst, thou say'st, thou couldst not be with me—
O dream, love, of the all-eternity,
When we together in God's house shall be!
And in that dream find joy's serenest gem.
For Beauty, and her Love, but merely hem
The singing-robe of Happiness: with them
Weave Faith; and with this flowered anadem,
Of dew-sweet buds, we'll reach from Bethlehem

To where bright Thrones and Dominations soar,
And 'mid dove-hushed tranquillities adore:
There shall we live and love for evermore—
In God's fair City.—

And that now we may,
Set love in order this bright Easter day,
Love, let us fare through yon sweet trellised way,
Unto our Lady's Chapel in the close,
In the Garden, which 'neath rays celestial grows:
Where Lilies, gold and silver-white,
Perfume the air with tremulous light,
And lead unto the Sweet and Mystical Rose
O' the World:—that through the devious ways of life,
Divinely nurtured, we may niggard strife.
Come, let us go, and pass a poet's hour,
Invoking Love and Beauty in that Flower,
Which in the Heaven Crystalline its bower
Of sweets delectable enshrineth high,
Set in the fairest garden of the sky:
That She with intercessionary power,
May lead our steps, where never more to sever,
Our sun of happiness shall shine for ever.—
But listen, love," she saith:

Now, suddenly,
Sweet strains of childish trebles, with melody
Entune the morning air. Together fly
We to the lattice, Rosamund and I:
Below, the Arno warbles on his way;
Upon our right the Ponte Vecchia,
His gaunt shape battered by the centuries,
Outstretches; on the street our wondering eyes
Behold a stream of singing maids in pairs,
Their eyes demure, and heads cast down, with airs
Devotional; while fairy-gossamer veils,
Like virgin spray that waves in fluttering gales,
Each sweet and girlish form of grace enfolds;
Each tiny hand a lighted taper holds;
Each little voice lifts up clear notes to Heaven:
“*Regina coeli laetare!* He is risen!
O Queen, rejoice! Sing Alleluia all!—”
And so in saintly slow processional,
Singing they pass into the chantry by.

Even then with tongues that hammer at the sky,
The Easter bells begin to blithely peal,
In golden harmonies, that woo our leal,
Commemoration of the risen Lord;

As though, in the Empyrean, with one accord,
Bright angels, in adoring companies,
Shake down celestial showers of melodies,
Like dew upon the hardened hearts of men;
Who tempered thus, and all attuned then,
Their joyful spirits breathe in hallowed sighs,
The concord felt that day in Paradise,—
Where the Infinite pours ceaselessly His love
In measureless abundance. A part thereof
Falleth on us in golden glorioles;
The iris Easter light o'erflows our souls;
The sun of joy upriseth in our hearts;
The spirit of Love, which hovers o'er us, parts,
In raptures mounting to the Gate of Heaven,
Where harps and viols to his ear are given,
To guide his trembling footsteps as he climbs.

O now my spirit ringeth with the chimes—
There is a Resurrection and a Life,
Beyond this sojourn of the soul's dear strife!
I know that Beauty, Love, and Happiness,
We shall together reap in endlessness!
Great Love! O beauteous World! Thou 'rt here to be
Our soul's sweet school to immortality!

O Death, thou 'st lost thy sting! O joy to feel,
My Rosamund, that come or woe or weal,
Thy beauty rare shall rise again in all
Its lure of loveliness corporeal;
Enshrining in the resurrection of
The spirit—ethereal and undying love!—

Rhodanthe, thy vision was not all a dream!
For feately, thou and my fair Rosamund, seem
Its rainbow colors intertangled in;

As ye had been
Twin-exhalations of a heavenly love,
As beauteous Aphrodite foam-born of
The iris-smiling sea,—
As wondrous weaved as ye could be:
O indissolubly!

As sighs engendered in the heart—
As beauty breathèd into art;
As notes entwined into harmonies;
As honey-gold in hives of bees;
As iris sheen on neck of dove;
As light from shining eyes of love;
As moonlight quivering in the wave,
Or darkness panting in a cave:

And both of ye to serve I strove,—
But one remains eternally—
Thou, Rosamund—thou spirit of fadeless beauty!

O inextinguishable bliss! at last to know,
Where'er the tide of Time will flow,
Our love lives on for aye;
And once the narrow way
We pass into the City's Upper Gate,—
Where early and late,
The Angel waiteth with his golden keys,—
Ah, far beyond the amethystine seas,
Beyond the Blessèd Isles,
O myriad intermittent miles,—
Our day-long work well done, we shall behold
The Light of Dawn that guards the good Sheep-fold;
The Star of Heaven, 'mid glorious pageantries,
Rising at Eastertide,
O'er all the opal domes oped wide,
Of Heaven's celestial mansionries;
And thou, Rhodanthe,—my Rosamund; with Thee,
The Rose that perfumes all Eternity;
And Him that sitteth at the Right,—
In the Garden of the Soul's Delight!

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